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Birth of
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RUSSIAN DRONE KILLERS

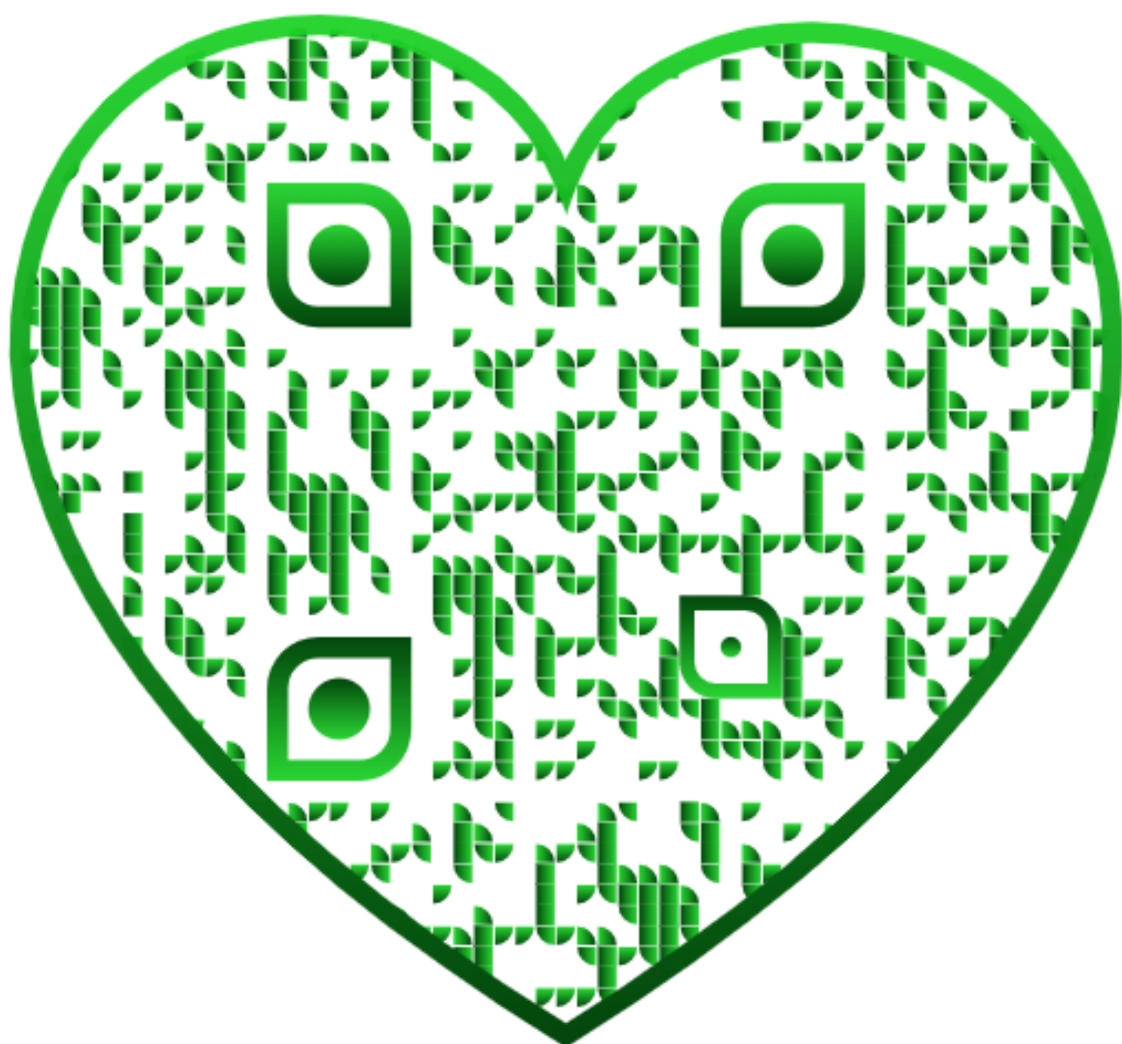
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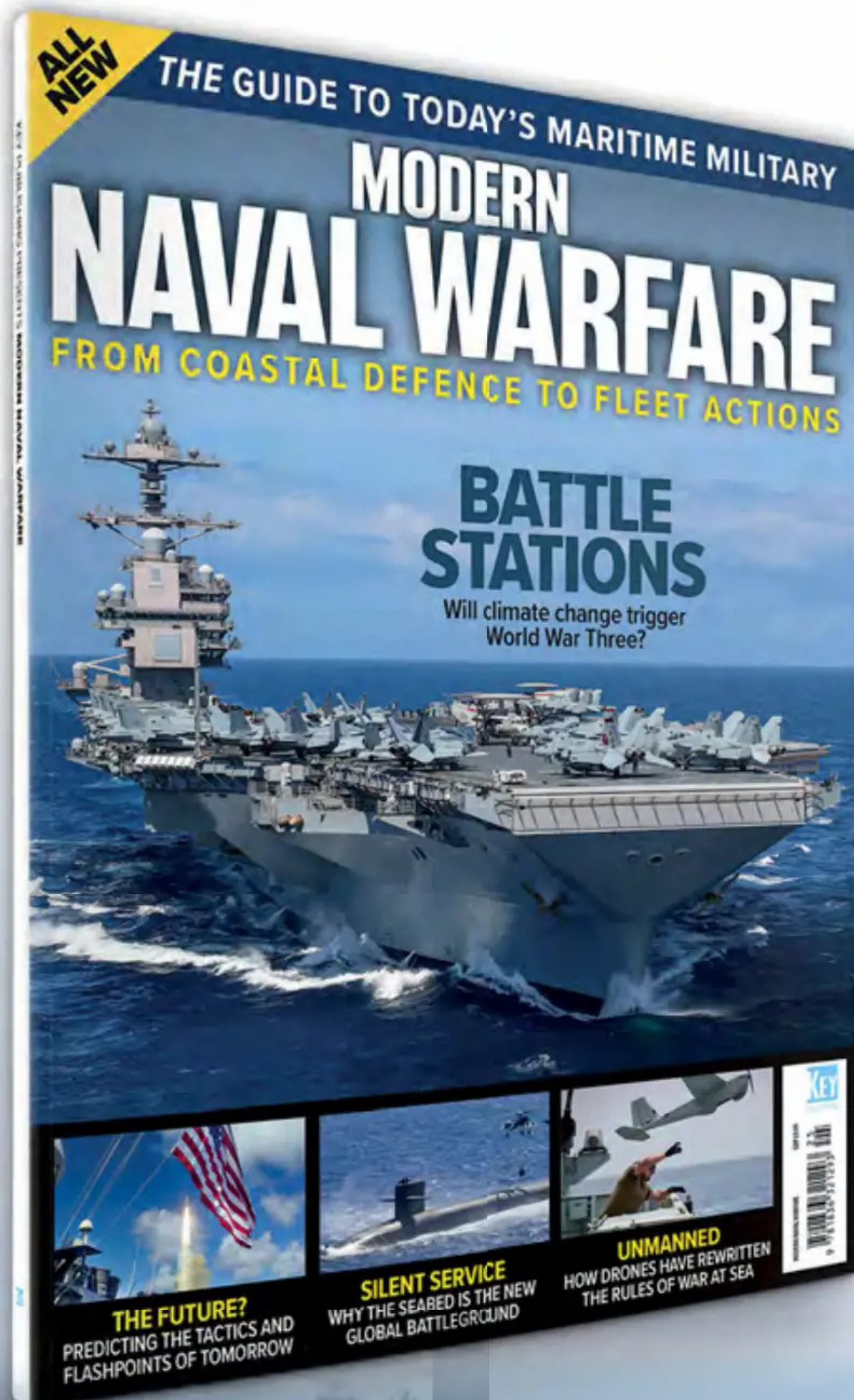
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A TEKEVER AR5 in front of the hangar doors at West Wales Airport Aviation News



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On the cover

Two Polish Air Force F-16s from the squadron responsible for shooting down Russian drones in Polish Air Space are seen breaking from the formation during an air policing mission. Filip Modrzewski

Welcome

Hello and welcome to the November edition of *Aviation News*. September was quite the month for military action in the UK, with President Donald Trump paying a visit, ex Cobra Warrior 25-2 bringing global participants to Lincolnshire, and the JASDF making history by bringing two of its F-15J Eagles to the UK for the first time in the service's history.

In the news, Russia continued to create headlines after 19 drones were reported to have crossed into Polish Airspace. These drones were shot down by NATO aircraft which were on NATO QRA and Air

Policing duties. As a result, Warsaw invoked Article 4 consultations which resulted in the launch of Operation Eastern Sentry. In other military news, Thailand became the launch customer of the Airbus MRTT+ variant, Belgium inaugurated its MQ-9B, and India said farewell to its fleet of MiG-21 Bisons after more than six decades.

In the commercial world, the Boeing Dreamliner rather dominated the news with the arrival of the first brand new 787 for Lufthansa, which also released a special schemed Dreamliner for its centenary next year. Orders for the Dreamliners came from Canadian WestJet, Uzbekistan

Airways and Turkish Airlines.

Among our features this month, we investigate a rare fleet of Egyptian IL-76MFs, and take a visit to West Wales Airport to see the operations of its new owner, TEKEVER. The capabilities that the unmanned systems TEKEVER make and operate are quite outstanding, and have been combat proven in Ukraine since 2022. Plus, the company is underway with project Overmatch which sees a £400m investment in the UK defence industry.

There are plenty of other insightful features for you to read in this issue and we hope you enjoy them.

Joe

Joe Campion, Editor

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Green light for Gatwick

THE GATWICK Airport Northern Runway application has been granted development consent by the UK's Secretary of State for Transport.

The project consists of the approval of Gatwick Airport to support dual-runway operations through the routine use of the existing Northern Runway and to accommodate up to 80 million passengers per annum. The development will include amendments to taxiways, terminal extensions and ancillary facilities, highways and rivers, as well as temporary construction work, mitigation work and other associated development.

Stewart Wingate, former Gatwick CEO and VINCI Airports managing director for the United Kingdom, said: "After a lengthy and rigorous planning process, we welcome the government's approval of plans to bring our Northern Runway into routine use, ahead of the expected deadline. This is another important gateway in the planning process for this £2.2bn investment, which is fully funded by our shareholders and will unlock significant growth, tourism and trade benefits for London Gatwick and the UK and create thousands of jobs.

"As we've said previously, it is essential that



any planning conditions enable us to realise the full benefits of the project and do not impose unnecessary constraints that make it uneconomic to invest in. We now need to carefully examine the details of the planning consent. Once we have done that, we will be able to comment further."

Routine use of the Northern Runway could bring an additional 60,000 flights per

year, including more long-haul routes, with passenger numbers increasing to around 80.2m passengers per year in 2047.

London Gatwick already contributes 76,000 jobs and £5.5bn to the UK economy every year. The privately funded project to bring the existing Northern Runway into regular use will deliver a further 14,000 jobs and £1bn in growth for the regional economy each year.

Drones disrupt Denmark

UNAUTHORISED FLIGHTS by small drones affected operations at Copenhagen Airport and Aalborg Airport in Denmark in September 2025. Inbound and outbound flights to and from Copenhagen were completely halted and the airport closed on the evening of September 22, 2025, after drones were seen flying in its airspace. A post on behalf of Copenhagen Airport on the social media platform X said "two-[to]-three large drones have been seen flying in the area."

A subsequent statement from the airport said: "At 2030[hrs local] several large drones were observed over and around Copenhagen Airport. The observations led to us immediately put in place the relevant safety procedures. After a dialogue with the police and Naviar [Denmark's air traffic control services provider], the airspace was temporarily closed to secure the area and to investigate the intention of the drones."

Arrivals were diverted to other airports and departures were delayed or cancelled. The airport said: "The drones came from several directions and moved in and out of the nearby airport over a period of approximately four hours." The drone

activity stopped at around 00:20hrs local on September 23, 2025, with the airspace reopening and operations resuming at 00:30hrs local.

A social media post on September 24, 2025, said operations were "back to normal" and that "the police estimate that this is a capable actor behind the drone activity. The exact cause of the presence of the drones is still unknown and the case is being investigated."

Mette Frederiksen, prime minister of Denmark, told reporters: "I consider this a serious attack on critical infrastructure in Denmark. One should not underestimate the fact that drones near airports can have extremely serious consequences. Those drones should not be there."

Two days after the disruption at Copenhagen, an unconfirmed number of drones were sighted flying above Aalborg Airport in southern Jutland on the evening of September 24. Flights were suspended

for three hours, reported the Danish police. Meanwhile, unauthorised drone flights overnight around Billund Airport on September 23/24, forced the airport's closure for around one hour. Drones were also observed flying above airports in Esbjerg, Sonderborg and Skrydstrup.

Speaking during a September 25 press conference, Denmark's defence minister, Troels Lund Poulsen, described the drone flying over Danish airports as a "hybrid attack" and the work of a "professional actor".



"Play to Win" - 21st Fighter Squadron



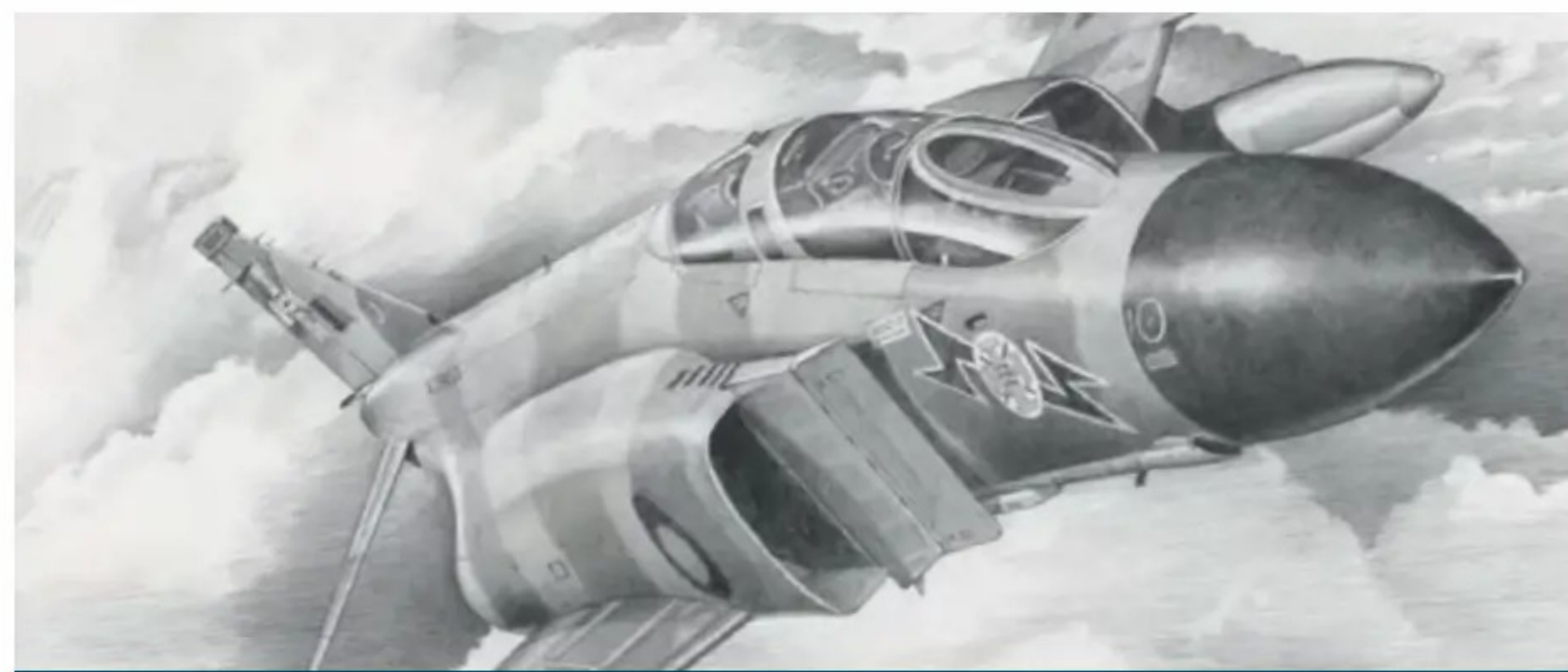
Celebrate the bold legacy of the 21st Fighter Squadron "Gamblers" with these brand-new flagship tail patches, featuring the striking new tail design on tail number "93-0814". Each patch mirrors the 21st FS's flagship tail artwork, complete with the orange starburst, "AZ" tail flash, and the squadron motto "PLAY TO WIN."

King & Queen Pair – One patch features the **King of Spades**, while the other showcases the **Queen of Spades**, symbolizing strength, strategy, and unity on both sides of the fight. Whether you're adding to your collection or repping your squadron, these patches embody the fighter spirit and the gambler's edge to win at all costs!

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Farewell to another fleet of 757s

Condor



GERMAN LEISURE carrier Condor will close the book on more than three decades of Boeing operations this autumn with the retirement of its final Boeing 757-300. The milestone marks the end of the Boeing era at the airline which has flown aircraft from the US manufacturer for 35 years.

Marking the occasion, Condor will operate a special farewell flight on November 5,

2025, departing Frankfurt for Vienna. The outbound service will be followed by a ground celebration in the Austrian capital before the aircraft returns to Germany with what the airline promises will be “the world’s highest party”. Just 75 seats were available and were auctioned off on September 22.

“By bidding farewell to the Boeing 757, an era at Condor comes to an end,”

commented Christian Schmitt, the airline’s chief operating officer. “At the same time, this marks the beginning of a new chapter with a modern, more efficient, and more sustainable Airbus fleet.”

Condor’s remaining seven Boeing 757s are expected to remain in service until the end of October, continuing to link Düsseldorf and Frankfurt with popular leisure destinations including Palma de Mallorca, Hurghada, Fuerteventura, and Gran Canaria. The type’s final scheduled flights are currently planned as Düsseldorf-Palma-Düsseldorf on October 29 and Frankfurt-Hurghada-Frankfurt on November 2.

The 757 has been a Condor workhorse for decades, particularly on high-density holiday routes. With its departure, the carrier’s transition to an all-Airbus fleet will gather pace, completing a fleet renewal strategy that has already seen the introduction of new-generation Airbus A320neo and A330neo aircraft.

Icelandair adds more A321LRs

ICELANDAIR HAS signed lease agreements with Chinese lessor CALC (China Aircraft Leasing Company) for two new Airbus A321LRs. The aircraft will be delivered directly from Airbus during the winter 2026/27 season, joining Icelandair’s growing fleet of A321LRs which are gradually replacing its long-serving Boeing 757s.

Bogi Nils Bogason, CEO of Icelandair, said:

“We are excited to welcome CALC as a new partner in our fleet development journey. The addition of these two Airbus A321LR aircraft supports our strategy to modernise our fleet with new, more efficient aircraft. Furthermore, it reflects our commitment to delivering an exceptional travel experience while strengthening our route network.”

Icelandair has already begun introducing

the A321LR into service. The additional pair come on top of existing leases for seven examples, of which four have already been handed over. The A321LR is set to become the backbone of its future transatlantic and European operations as the Boeing 757 fleet is gradually phased out. The first airframe from its 13-strong A321XLR firm order is due to arrive in 2029.

First Dreamliner for Lufthansa

LUFTHANSA HAS welcomed its first brand-new Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner, fresh from the factory in Seattle. The aircraft, D-ABPF (c/n 66817), which also debuts the airline’s long-haul Allegris cabin concept at its main hub, landed in Frankfurt on August 30, before entering service on the Frankfurt-Toronto route from mid-October.

The milestone marks the first time Lufthansa has received a brand-new 787 directly from Boeing. The five Dreamliners already in the fleet were so-called “white tails” – originally destined for other carriers before being acquired by Lufthansa, with the first arriving in August 2022.

Lufthansa plans to take delivery of up to nine more 787-9s by the end of this year, averaging one every two weeks. In total, the carrier has 29 Dreamliners on

order and expects to operate 78 long-haul aircraft fitted with Allegris interiors in

the coming years – billed as the largest widebody fleet renewal in its history.



Lufthansa

Largest Canadian Boeing order in History



CANADIAN AIRLINE WestJet has confirmed a deal with Boeing to acquire 60 737 MAX 10 aircraft, alongside seven 787-9 Dreamliners, with options for 25 and four additional aircraft, respectively. Scheduled

for delivery until 2034, the order expands WestJet's fleet growth plans and brings its firm order book with Boeing to 123 aircraft. WestJet CEO, Alexis von Hoensbroech, said: "With the addition of these aircraft,

WestJet has the largest order book of any airline in Canada and will double our fleet of Dreamliners. These highly efficient and comfortable aircraft are critical to the growth and renewal of our fleet and will also significantly improve our fuel consumption."

The order is the largest Canadian Boeing purchase in history. WestJet currently operates 192 aircraft, including 150 Boeing 737s, seven 787s and 35 de Havilland Canada DHC-8-400s, with an average fleet age of roughly ten years. The carrier began operations in 1996 with three Boeing 737 aircraft.

Separately, WestJet has announced an interline partnership with Copa Airlines, giving passengers access to 37 Copa destinations in Central and South America. Copa travellers will gain access to WestJet's North American network.

Air Côte d'Ivoire receives A330neo

IVORY COAST flag carrier Air Côte d'Ivoire has taken delivery of its first Airbus A330-900, marking the introduction of widebody aircraft to the airline's fleet. The aircraft, TU-TRG (c/n 2086), the first of two on order, features a four-class configuration with four first-class seats, 44 business, 21 premium economy and 173 economy. The second airframe, TU-TRH (c/n 2098), is expected before the end of the year. The delivery flight from Toulouse to Abidjan carried five tonnes of humanitarian supplies in collaboration with the Airbus Foundation and Aviation Sans Frontières.

The airline reported: "The A330neo will play a key role in Air Côte d'Ivoire's expansion plans." The aircraft was initially scheduled to enter service in 2024, but multiple delays postponed its delivery. It is equipped with Airbus' Airspace cabin, offering larger overhead bins, a new lighting system and access to a state-of-



the-art in-flight entertainment system. Air Côte d'Ivoire serves 22 destinations. The A330-900 fleet will play a key role in the airline's expansion plans to Europe, starting on the Abidjan/Félix Houphouët Boigny to Paris/Charles de Gaulle route, and later to destinations in the Middle East

and North America. Six flights per week will initially operate to Paris, increasing to seven from November 15. The airline previously operated only medium and short-haul aircraft namely three Airbus A320s, five A319s and four de Havilland Canada DHC-8-400s.

E195-E2 for LATAM

ON SEPTEMBER 22, Embraer announced that LATAM Airlines Group and its affiliates will acquire up to 74 Embraer E195-E2 small narrowbody aircraft to join its current fleet of 362 aircraft. This is with a rationale to expand connectivity across South America. The E195 will join 283 Airbus narrow-bodies, three Airbus wide bodies, 56 Boeing wide-bodies, and 20 Boeing freighters.

The order includes a firm order of 24 deliveries worth a value of approximately US\$2.1bn and 50 purchase options. Deliveries of the 24 aircraft are scheduled

to commence in the second half of next year. The first aircraft will see LATAM Airlines Brazil service and potentially later for other LATAM group affiliates.

The airline is building on a steady and profitable growth achieved over the last four years. Since 2021, LATAM Group has expanded its network from 129 to 160 passenger destinations. The new fleet will allow further flexibility across LATAM Group's hubs, enabling the group to serve additional destinations and expand its offerings to customers.

CEO of LATAM Airlines Group, Roberto

Alvo, said: "Over the past four years, LATAM group has focused on expanding its domestic and regional network, creating the most comprehensive and seamless way of travelling within South America. LATAM group's decision is based on the excellent economics and versatility of the Embraer E195-E2, which will allow us to continue our path of profitable growth by enhancing that connectivity through the opening of new destinations, allowing our passengers to have even more options and bringing communities closer, boosting also economic and social development."

Uzbekistan Airways largest ever purchase



Uzbekistan Airways is the first operator of the Dreamliner in central Asia. It utilises the aircraft to provide customers flights to Europe, Asia and the US, including a direct city to New York.

Uzbekistan Airways Chairman, Shukhrat Khudaikulov, said: "The Boeing 787 Dreamliner family has proven to be the cornerstone of our long-haul operations. With this new contract, we are further strengthening both our airline's and our nation's position as a leading aviation hub in Central Asia, while providing our passengers with greater global connectivity. This step reaffirms our ambitions and strategic commitment to sustainable growth."

UZBEKISTAN AIRWAYS and Boeing announced on September 22 that the flag carrier plans to acquire up to 22 787-9

Dreamliners. This is the largest order in the airline's history and comprises the purchase of 14 787-9s with an option for eight more.

Boeing

Turkish Airlines orders up to 75 Dreamliners

A LONG-EXPECTED order for Boeing 787 Dreamliners by Turkish Airlines was announced on September 26, 2025, while another for up to 150 Boeing 737 MAXs is close.

The deal covers a total of 35 787-9s and 15 787-10s, the first commitment by the Türkiye flag carrier for the higher-capacity variant of the Dreamliner. Options for an additional 25 787s of unspecified variant (or variants) are included in the deal. The carrier has yet to decide on which powerplants will be installed on the new airliners, with talks continuing with both GE Aerospace and Rolls-Royce. Turkish's existing 787s uses the GENx, but this does not preclude the selection of the Trent 1000; Rolls-Royce has a facility in Istanbul for the airline's Trent-powered Airbus widebodies.

Deliveries of the 787s are expected to start in 2029 and continue into 2034, according



Boeing

to the airline. As stated in the carrier's press release of September 26.

Turkish Airlines has also outlined its intention to purchase 100 Boeing 737 MAXs, comprising a mix of the 737-8 and the larger -10 variant. Conclusion of a firm purchase agreement for the MAXs awaits the outcome of negotiations with

CFM International over the purchase of LEAP-1B powerplants for the new fleet. The airline has also secured options for another 50 Boeing 737 MAXs from the airframe manufacturer. According to the airline, "the 737 MAX aircraft will enhance efficiency and flexibility on short- and medium-haul routes."



Lufthansa reveals centenary scheme

On September 26, Lufthansa rolled out a Boeing 787-9 with a special livery to celebrate the airlines centenary. The aircraft, D-ABPU is due to take flight in December carrying the airlines unique crane around the world. The scheme was applied in Charleston, USA and is due to arrive in Frankfurt in November.

A five-day ferry



Embraer

VIRGIN AUSTRALIA Regional Airlines (VARA) has taken delivery of its first Embraer E190-E2, following a 15,000-mile (25,000km) journey from Brazil to Perth. The aircraft, VH-E2A (c/n 19020185) named Coral Bay, is Embraer's 1,900th E-Jet delivered and will primarily serve Western Australia's charter market, while also supporting scheduled services.

The five-day ferry flight between São José dos Campos and Perth took in six stops at Willemstad/Curaçao, Brownsville/South Padre in Texas, Ontario in California, Kona/Ellison Onizuka in Hawaii, Nadi in Fiji, and Canberra.

Delivered from leasing company Azorra's firm orderbook with Embraer, another three aircraft will be handed over to Virgin Australia later this year and through to 2026. Virgin Australia has

a total of eight firm orders for E2 aircraft. The next-generation narrowbodies are 30% more fuel-efficient than the retiring Fokker 100s.

Nick Rohrlach, group executive, VARA, said: "We are incredibly excited by the introduction of the Embraer E190-E2s to the Virgin Australia Regional Airlines' fleet. Replacing our Fokker 100s with these next-generation jets allows us to better connect resources industry clients and regional communities across Western Australia with improved reliability, significantly reduced noise, and lower emissions. These aircraft are perfectly designed for the challenging climates and environments we operate in, while offering our customers a spacious and comfortable in-flight experience."

Refreshed Livery for Transavia



Transavia has unveiled a refreshed livery on its latest Airbus A320neo, F-HXSX (c/n 12827). The updated scheme – spotted on the yet to be delivered airframe – retains the airline's signature green "T" logo and colour palette, while introducing a modern font for the fuselage titles, all-green engines, and redesigned sharklets. The aircraft will fly with Transavia France, while the first Airbus A321neo in the new colours is due to follow in late 2025. Transavia

NEWS IN BRIEF

Aer Lingus will launch a new Dublin to Raleigh-Durham service in April 2026 as part of its largest-ever transatlantic summer schedule. The year-round route, operated up to five times weekly by Airbus A321XLRs, will be the carrier's 26th North American destination. Summer 2026 will also see a third daily flight to New York/JFK and Boston/Logan, frequency boosts to Nashville, Indianapolis, Orlando and Shannon-Boston, reflecting strong demand and Aer Lingus' expanding Dublin hub strategy.

Cargo carrier **Kalitta Air** has received the world's first three Boeing 777-300ERSF freighters converted from passenger aircraft. The trio – N770CK (c/n 32792), N771CK (c/n 32791) and N778CK (c/n 321789) – were delivered by lessor AerCap and include the certification prototype. Kalitta, launch customer for the groundbreaking conversion programme, was due to introduce the aircraft into commercial service in October as part of its transition away from ageing 747 freighters. The Michigan-based cargo carrier has a total of seven 777-300ERSFs on order.

British cargo carrier **One Air** took delivery of its first Boeing 777F on August 25. The General Electric GE90-powered freighter, G-ONEG (c/n 68454), joined the East Midlands-based airline's all-747 fleet which comprises a pair of 747-433BDSFs and a single nose-loading 747-428ERF. The twinjet was ferried from Seattle/Paine Field to Cardiff, arriving on August 27 and entered service on September 5. According to ch-aviation, the aircraft is being leased from Moldovan airline Aerotranscargo.

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) halted its Lahore-Paris/Charles de Gaulle service from mid-September, barely eight weeks after the route's launch. The twice-weekly flights had begun on June 18, 2025, but weak passenger loads prompted the carrier to end the service. The airline stressed that the suspension was only temporary and was tied to a shift of resources towards the UK, where it hopes to relaunch services this autumn.

Second USAF B-21 arrives

THE USAF received a second Northrop Grumman B-21 Raider flight test aircraft at Edwards Air Force Base (AFB), California, on September 11, 2025.

According to an official statement: “The addition of the second aircraft expands the air force’s testing capabilities beyond initial flight performance checks, enabling progression into critical mission systems and weapon integration testing phases. This advancement marks a significant step toward operational readiness of the nation’s sixth-generation stealth bomber.”

Secretary of the USAF Troy Meink said the arrival of the second B-21 Raider gives “substantial momentum” to the new type’s flight test campaign: “We can now expedite critical evaluations of mission

systems and weapons capabilities, directly supporting the strategic deterrence and combat effectiveness envisioned for this aircraft.”

Edwards AFB is home to the B-21 Raider Combined Test Force, under which Northrop Grumman and USAF personnel are testing the new bomber. USAF Chief of Staff General David Allvin said the second B-21 “accelerates the path to fielding. By having more assets in the test environment we bring this capability to our war fighters faster, demonstrating the urgency with which we’re tackling modernisation.”

A statement from the USAF on September 11, 2025, said the B-21 programme “continues to execute its flight testing and ground testing campaigns as well as low-

rate initial production.” According to a Northrop Grumman announcement: “The next phase of flight test moves beyond flight performance and into the weapons and mission systems that make B-21 an unrivalled stealth bomber. An enhanced software package will demonstrate how Northrop Grumman will deliver seamless upgrades to the B-21 fleet, ensuring its mission capability and weapons evolve to outpace any threat. The flight test expansion complements a robust ground test campaign that includes multiple B-21 aircraft. Engineers have rigorously tested the B-21 to certify it can fly in the most extreme mission conditions and are demonstrating the B-21’s durability by simulating lifetimes of flight conditions.”



USAF/Northrop Grumman

First airborne refuelling of RAF P-8

ON SEPTEMBER 18, the RAF announced that 42(Torpedo Bomber) Squadron made history by conducting the first ever air-to-air refuelling (AAR) of a P-8 Poseidon aircraft in the UK.

The P-8 was refuelled during multinational exercise Cobra Warrior 25-2 by a USAF Boeing KC-135 Stratotanker based at RAF Mildenhall. The AAR extended the P-8s ability to serve the exercise and its missions for a longer duration without having to return to RAF Lossiemouth.

The pilot in command of the P-8 was Sqn Ldr Kane, who served three years as a US Navy exchange pilot with Operational Test and Evaluation Sqn (VX-1) at NAS Patuxent River in Maryland, US. During this time, Kane completed the AAR pilot course and subsequently the AAR instructor pilot course.

A spokesperson from RAF Lossiemouth said: “This is a major milestone for the UK Poseidon. The P-8 is already a versatile aircraft, but being able to extend the time those missions can stay in the air will be of huge benefit to both the RAF and our allies. This exercise has also shown the importance of being able to operate with and alongside, our allies. On behalf of the P8 crew, I’d like to thank our



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USAF colleagues for aiding us in making the first AAR a success. We look forward to working together in the future.”

Following two successful AAR training

missions, further test flights are due to continue between the RAF and the USAF to ensure the P-8 and its crew are ready to utilise the capability in an operational environment.



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Maryland retires A-10s

ON SEPTEMBER 22, Maryland Air National Guard (ANG) officially retired its last A-10C Thunderbolt II 'Warthogs', making it the only ANG in the US without a flying mission, marking the end of an era for the 104th Fighter Squadron. The final two A-10s departed in a ceremony at Martin State Airport. The retired A-10s are set to be transferred to the Michigan ANG, with Maryland pilots completing the handover in accordance with the USAF's divestment deadline of September 30.

The retirement of the Warthogs has also

resulted in the deactivation of the 175th Operations Group, the 175th Maintenance Group and all subordinate units. Hundreds of service members who were previously assigned to the 104th Fighter Squadron are expected to transition into cyber operations roles. Although controversial, this decision has been in the making for years amid discussions about the future of the A-10.

First introduced in the 1970s, the A-10 was the USAF's first aircraft designed exclusively for close air support, featuring

a GAU-8/A Avenger Gatling gun capable of delivering devastating firepower against ground targets. Despite its storied combat history and reputation for durability, the aircraft has increasingly been considered obsolete against emerging aerial threats and advanced munitions.

With the Warthogs retired, Maryland's ANG enters a new chapter focused on cyber and support missions, marking a significant shift from its century-long legacy of flight operations.

Roelof-Jan Gort



USAF

A330 MRTT+ for Thailand

A SIGNING ceremony was held at Getafe, Spain, on September 25, 2025, to confirm an order for a single Airbus A330 multi-role tanker transport plus (MRTT+) for the Royal Thai Air Force. The following day, a contract for two Airbus Helicopters H225Ms was also announced.

Thailand's A330 MRTT+ will be equipped with a flying boom and hose and drogue pods, allowing it to refuel both Lockheed Martin F-16 Fighting Falcons and Saab JAS 39 Gripen, which form the bulk of the Royal

Thai Air Force's high-end combat capability. Thailand has also opted to acquire the Airbus medical evacuation kit solution that can be installed in the tanker-transport, as well as a VVIP cabin configuration, to increase the number of roles it will be able to perform once in service.

The aircraft will be built as a 'green' A330-800 airframe and delivered to the A330 MRTT Centre in Getafe at some point in 2026. Following configuration as a MRTT+, it is expected to be delivered to the Royal Thai

Air Force in 2029.

The order for the A330 MRTT+ makes Thailand the launch customer for the latest version of the tanker-transport, which is based on the current, in-production A330neo family. The A330 MRTT+ was launched in July 2024 at the Farnborough International Airshow.

The previous 84 A330 MRTTs, ordered by ten customers across the world, are based on the A330-200 airframe. Development of the A330 MRTT+ was prompted by several factors including production of the A330-200 ending in 2018.

Jean-Brice Dumont, head of air power at Airbus Defence and Space, commented: "Thailand's selection of the A330 MRTT+ underlines the trust placed in this platform, while embracing the next evolution in efficiency, capability and sustainability. This natural evolution of the A330 MRTT, which will be a key asset for the Royal Thai Air Force operations, builds on its proven performance over the past years in service with nine customers all over the world, accumulating more than 340,000 flight hours." **David Wilis**



Airbus

Iran deploys Russian MiG-29s

ON SEPTEMBER 23, 2025, Iran announced the arrival of Russian MiG-29 fighters at Shiraz air base. This deployment marks a significant step in modernising an air force still largely reliant on US-made aircraft produced before 1979. The MiG-29s are intended as a temporary measure until more advanced Su-35s arrive, which underscores the strengthening military ties between Iran and Moscow, escalating concerns for the US, Israel and Gulf allies.

Although the MiG-29 first flew in the 1980s, its importance lies in the weapons it can carry. Equipped with Russian missiles such as the R-73 short-range and R-27 medium-range, Iranian pilots will have enhanced lethality in air combat. If Iran receives the R-77 long-range missile,

it could achieve true beyond-visual-range capability, altering the strategic calculations for Israeli and Gulf air operations.

The jets also expand Iran's strike capabilities. They are compatible with heavy Kh-29 air-to-surface missiles, as well as Kh-31 anti-ship and anti-radar variants, enabling them to target naval movements in the Persian Gulf or suppress enemy air defenses. Until now, Iran has relied mainly on ballistic missiles and drones, but these aircraft will diversify its military arsenal and complicate regional military planning.

The strategic location of Shiraz allows coverage over the Persian Gulf, Iraq and, with tanker support, extended reach westward. In conjunction with potential

S-400 or HQ-9 surface-to-air systems, the MiG-29s are part of a broader strategy to make Iranian airspace more difficult to penetrate. Even a limited number of jets armed with advanced Russian weapons sends a clear message that Tehran aims to rebuild its deterrent capabilities after previous Israeli strikes damaged its S-300 network.

Although the MiG-29s are technically outclassed by Israeli F-35s and Gulf Eurofighters, they still pose a credible threat due to their modern missile capabilities. The eventual arrival of Su-35s will further enhance Iran's long-range and stand-off strike capabilities, providing more options for defending its airspace and projecting power into the Gulf and the Levant. **Roelof-Jan Gort**

Belgian MQ-9s inaugurated

ON SEPTEMBER 23, the Belgian Air Force officially inaugurated the first General Atomics MQ-9B SkyGuardian, serialised MS-01. In 2018, the Belgian government ordered two systems, each comprising of a pair of MQ-9B drones. The first aircraft arrived in Belgium on August 18, 2025, aboard an A400M and had already made a few training flights before its official inauguration. A second aircraft is scheduled to arrive later this year, followed by numbers three and four in 2026.

The Belgian Air Force plans to order a

third system for delivery in 2029. This follow-on buy will consist of modernised version of the MQ-9B. The drones already in service will then be upgraded to this new standard.

The MQ-9B's are operated by No 2 'Comet' Squadron, which until 2001 operated the F-16 Fighting Falcon. In May 2023, the squadron was re-formed within its old unit 2 Wing at Florennes air base to prepare for the arrival of the Skyguardian. A purpose-build hangar was constructed from 2022 onwards and was also officially

inaugurated on September 23.

The plan is to reach initial operational capability (IOC) in the third quarter of 2026 and full operational capability (FOC) in the 2nd quarter of 2027.

When the drones were ordered in 2018, the Belgian government made the choice not to arm them, a decision that was overruled in early 2025 by the current government. By 2027, the armament kits will be delivered, which coincides with the period that FOC will be reached.

Laurent Heyligen



Laurent Heyligen

Lithuania hosts Turkish Peace Eagle

TURKEY HAS deployed an E-7T Peace Eagle airborne warning and control system (AWACS) aircraft to Lithuania in response to repeated airspace violations by Russian forces along NATO's eastern flank. According to the Turkish Embassy in Vilnius, the aircraft was temporarily stationed at Šiauliai Air Base from September 22-25. This deployment follows a series of incursions involving Russian drones and fighter jets in the Baltic region, prompting NATO to enhance its air defences.

Turkish officials have stated that this deployment enhances NATO's rapid reaction capacity in the region. For frontline allies, including Lithuania, Estonia, Denmark, and Poland – countries that have reported multiple Russian airspace intrusions in recent weeks – this mission represents both practical reinforcement and a show of solidarity.

The deployment carries both symbolic and strategic significance. NATO has relied on AWACS platforms since the Cold War to monitor Soviet aircraft and co-ordinate defence efforts. Today, the Turkish E-7T fulfils a similar role, adapted to an environment shaped by drone warfare and hybrid threats. Beyond the immediate Baltic mission, Turkey's contribution highlights its growing role within NATO's surveillance and defence framework. **Roelof-Jan Gort**



Turkish Air Force / NATO

Sikorsky secures \$10.8bn USMC deal



Lockheed Martin

THE US Marine Corps (USMC) transition to the CH-53K King Stallion advanced significantly this week as Sikorsky, part of Lockheed Martin, landed a \$10.8 billion contract from the US Navy to build up to 99 of the heavy-lift helicopters. The five-year award is the largest yet for the programme,

guaranteeing production and delivery between 2029 and 2034.

More than just a purchase order, the agreement consolidates five planned buys—Lots 9 through 13—into one streamlined contract. This not only locks in pricing but also provides stability to Sikorsky's 267 suppliers across 37 US states, as well as 17 more in eight

allied nations. For the USMC, it means predictable deliveries and a clear path to replacing its aging CH-53E fleet.

Sikorsky vice-president Rich Benton said: "The CH-53K brings unparalleled lifting power, performance and survivability to the Marines. With this contract, we can drive efficiency, strengthen our workforce and keep the CH-53K programme resilient in a rapidly changing global security environment."

The Marine Corps has already received 20 CH-53Ks, with another 63 in various stages of assembly. Col Kate Fleeger, who leads the Pentagon's H-53 programme office, called the deal "a major win for the entire CH-53K team", citing bundled supplier orders that will cut costs and speed deliveries.

With its ability to carry heavy loads over long distances – even in hot, high and challenging environments – the CH-53K is set to become the backbone of USMC heavy-lift operations for decades.

Roelof-Jan Gort

‘Red Devils’ deploy to Japan

MARINE FIGHTER Attack Squadron VMFA-232 flew to MCAS Iwakuni in Japan on September 8 in support of the Unit Deployment Program (UDP). Upon arrival, the ‘Red Devils’ replaced the VMFA-214 ‘Black Sheep’, marking the end of the first F-35B squadron mission under the UDP program. During its time in Japan, the squadron, which is normally based at MCAS Miramar in California, will be assigned to the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing’s Marine Aircraft Group MAG-12. VMFA-214 has been deployed from MCAS Yuma, Arizona, to Iwakuni since March 8.



P-8s for Singapore

IN EARLY September, it was announced that Four Boeing P-8A Poseidons will be acquired for the Republic of Singapore Air Force to upgrade its airborne maritime patrol capabilities. The announcement was made during a meeting between the Singaporean Minister for Defence, Chan Chun Sing, and US Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth, at the Pentagon.

The aircraft are to be acquired under the first phase of a programme to upgrade the nation’s naval security capabilities, strengthening its overall maritime situational awareness

and ability to counter threats from submarines, according to the Ministry of Defence. No further details covering when a contract will be signed, how much Singapore will spend on the programme or a delivery schedule for the aircraft, were revealed at the meeting. At the time of writing, the aircraft’s manufacturer had not commented on the announcement, while a potential foreign military sale (FMS) notification for the aircraft had not been released by the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency.

Singapore is the fifth nation in the Asia-Pacific region to select the Poseidon as its new maritime platform, after Australia, India (as the Neptune), New Zealand and South Korea. In Europe, three countries have selected the P-8: Germany, Norway and the UK. In North America, in addition to the US, Canada is also a Poseidon customer.

The Poseidons will replace five Fokker 50 MPA Enforce Mk 2s that have been in service with 121 Squadron of the Republic of Singapore Air Force since 1993.

David Willis

India retires MiG-21s



Kedar Karmarkar

ON SEPTEMBER 26, India celebrated the official retirement of its final fleet of MiG-21 fighter jets, marking the end of an incredible journey that has spanned more than six decades. This iconic warplane

leaves behind a legacy that will forever resonate in the annals of Indian aviation.

With the departure of the MiG-21s, the Indian Air Force is poised for a transformative phase of modernisation

to meet evolving security demands. The government has already contracted HAL for 97 Tejas Mk-1A jets, with plans for these advanced fighters to enter service from 2027.

Textron electric prototype paused

THE CURRENT trend towards electric cars is being reflected in the General Aviation industry, with a number of new models under development. However, it has received a setback as Textron suspends development of its new high technology e-VTOL aircraft. A prototype of its Nexus, which is a single pilot air taxi with accommodation for four passengers and with four articulated engine pods and two lift propellers, it should have entered tethered flight testing this year.

However, it has been halted as the company changes course to concentrate on what it describes as "more vital projects".

This market for Urban Utility Vehicles is becoming quite crowded, with contenders including the WISK, Joby S4, Supernal SA2 and Archer Midnight. Textron has said the first flight of the Nexus One from its Salina, Kansas base will no longer take place in 2025, as originally anticipated, although a prototype has been under construction

since 2024, so an in-service date of 2030 now seems more realistic.



Textron

Mooney's production return

MOONEY AIRCRAFT has delivered no production aircraft since 2019 when it delivered seven Acclaim Ultras and two Ovation Ultras. However, new finance from Soaring America Corporation, headed by Jerry Chen, will bring new production aircraft back from January 2026. Mooney's M20V Acclaim Ultra is a high performance four-seater with a top speed of 242kts and a service ceiling of

25,000ft, equipped with the latest avionics and navigation systems. It is powered by a 280hp Continental TSIO-550G and this latest model has a second left side pilot's door supplementing the traditional single door on the right. Its cabin structure has also been changed from metal to a single-piece composite shell. Mooney also builds the M20U Ovation Ultra with a 310hp Continental engine.



Rod Simpson

Old models dropped by Vans



Rod Simpson

VANS AIRCRAFT has announced some changes to its product line from October 2025. While the company continues to build the factory-complete two-seat RV12iS Light Sport trainer at the Aurora, Oregon factory, it is best known for its range of kit aircraft. Today these include the RV7/7A, RV8/8A, RV9/9A, RV10, RV14/14A and the new high wing, RV15 but it has announced it is discontinuing its traditional RV3, RV4 and RV6 kits. The original RV3 single-seater was launched in 1972 and the two-seat RV6 has been one of the most popular home builds across the world, with more than 2,700 built and flown with either tailwheel or tricycle undercarriages.

New Citation Ascend rollout



Textron Aviation

CESSNA FLEW its first Citation business jet as long ago as September 1969, and more than 8,400 of the 500-series light/midsize jets have been delivered to date in addition to 1,700 of the larger 600 and 700 series. Its latest model, the Citation Ascend, will receive FAA certification in the next few weeks and on September 15 the first production example was rolled out at the Wichita, Kansas factory. The Ascend, which is a development of the Model 560 XLS+ and has a flat cabin floor, can carry up to 12 passengers, although there are nine passenger seats as standard. It features new higher thrust 4,213lb st Pratt & Whitney Canada PW545D FADEC-controlled turbofan engines and the latest Garmin G5000 avionics with autothrottle capability.

Lancaster bomber tribute unveiled

A SCULPTURE named *On Freedom's Wings* featuring a full-size representation of an Avro Lancaster Mk.I has been erected next to the A46 in Norton Disney, Lincolnshire. Created by the Bomber County Gateway Trust, the steel structure is a tribute to all World War Two air crews.

A pair of cranes lifted the eye-catching creation into place on September 7, before around 40 volunteers securely installed it. Around 35,000 motorists

a day will see the sculpture – tilted to give the impression that the Lancaster is in flight – from the road as they drive between Lincoln and Newark. The site of RAF Swinderby, a former Lancaster base, is around two miles away.

Plans for the art installation were formed in 2018, marking the RAF's centenary. Work is continuing at the site, which will be open to the public when landscaping has been completed.



'On Freedom's Wings', the new Lancaster sculpture in Lincolnshire. Bomber County Gateway Trust

Funding boost for Barracuda rebuild project

THE NATIONAL Museum of the Royal Navy (NMRN) has been awarded nearly £50,000 from The National Archives' Archives Revealed programme, funding that will support its project to reconstruct a complete Fairey Barracuda.

The enterprise, dubbed Barracuda Live: The Big Rebuild, gathers surviving

aircraft parts from crash sites across the British Isles. Each part undergoes a rigorous conservation process to verify authenticity, stabilise condition, and preserve its historical significance. This work is shared through an innovative 'Live Conservation' programme at the Fleet Air Arm Museum in Somerset.

The grant will allow the team to unlock vital technical drawings, development notes, test reports, and design documents buried deep within the Fairey Aviation archive. Of value are original Barracuda schematics – effectively the aircraft's instruction manual – which will directly guide the reconstruction effort.

Grumman Tracker returns to Australian skies



Grumman S-2G Tracker 844, flying again in New South Wales. Howard Mitchell-HARS

AUSTRALIA'S HISTORICAL Aviation Restoration Society (HARS) has announced that former Royal Australian Navy (RAN) Grumman S-2G Tracker 844 made its first flight in nearly 18 months recently near Illawarra, New South Wales.

This aircraft was one of 16 delivered to the RAN in 1977 to replace ten Trackers destroyed in a hangar fire at HMAS Albatross (RAN Air Station Nowra) on the night of December 4, 1976. Tracker 844 operated from Nowra, the aircraft carrier HMAS Melbourne and RAAF

Darwin searching for Vietnamese refugee boats sailing to Australia.

Following retirement, the aircraft continued to fly in the 1980s and 1990s as part of the RAN Historic Flight before being acquired by HARS. It made its first flight in 21 years on September 14, 2019.

Babcock secures four-year air ambulance extension

BABCOCK HAS reinforced its long-standing partnership with Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance (HIOWAA), signing a four-year contract extension to continue providing advanced helicopter emergency medical services (HEMS) across the region.

Under the renewed agreement, Babcock will operate a fully equipped Airbus H135, featuring cutting-edge Night Vision Imaging System (NVIS) technology to support safe night operations. The contract also covers

comprehensive aircraft maintenance, rigorous safety and compliance management, and the deployment of highly trained aviation personnel, ensuring HIOWAA retains its 19-hour daily operational capability.

The extension coincides with HIOWAA's relocation to a new base near Southampton Airport, strategically positioned to improve response times across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. The move is expected to enhance the charity's mission readiness and

strengthen its ability to deliver life-saving care efficiently.

Chloe Barker, Managing Director of Babcock UK Aviation, said: "The HIOWAA service provides a critical lifeline to communities across the region. Our continued collaboration ensures rapid access to advanced medical care in some of the most urgent and challenging scenarios. As HIOWAA transitions to its new base, we are working closely to maintain seamless service and maximise operational readiness." **Roleof Jan Gort**

StarFlight orders Airbus H145s



A NEW phase in Tasmania's airborne emergency response began on September 24. StarFlight confirmed an order for three Airbus H145 helicopters. This fleet will provide essential aeromedical and law enforcement support to Ambulance Tasmania and Tasmania Police, bringing a new level of helicopter capability to the island state.

The H145s are set to enter service in late 2027. They will be based in Hobart and operate across Tasmania's diverse

landscapes, from rugged coastlines to mountainous areas, carrying out life-saving missions that require speed and versatility. For Airbus, it adds a new Australian customer. For the state government, it signifies a significant investment in future-ready helicopter operations.

"The multirole functionality of these aircraft will allow us to respond quickly to various emergencies," said Michelle Baxter, Acting Chief Executive of Ambulance

Tasmania. "We look forward to the improved service it will provide to our communities."

Each helicopter is expected to fly about 1,500 hours a year over the next decade. They will perform aeromedical evacuations, search-and-rescue missions, and aerial law enforcement operations. The quick-change cabin layout of the H145 was a significant factor in its selection, enabling crews to switch easily between different mission types. **Roleof Jan Gort**

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Tim Savage's P-40 Warhawk represents the fighter USAAF ace John D Landers made his combat debut in, as detailed by Uwe Glaser

'G-FOR-GEORGE'

Pete Wooding relates the story of a famous Lancaster and its recent return home to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra

ROLL WITH IT

Stefan Schmoll reports from the Vintage Aerobatic World Championships, an event that now attracts thousands of visitors



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Russian drone incursion

▲ A pair of armed Polish Air Force F-16Cs 'Jastrząb' from 31. ELT, a component unit of 31.BLT that took part in shooting down of the Russian drones Filip Modrzejewski

▼ F-35A F-039 seen after its arrival at Poznań Air Base on August 29, 2025 RNLAf/ Christian Schrik

ON SEPTEMBER 9-10, it was reported that there were 19 Russian drone incursions into Polish airspace during one of Moscow's most extensive strike campaigns against Ukraine, triggering NATO's first live-fire defence of alliance territory. Polish Air Force F-16Cs from 31. Baza Lotnicza Taktycznego (31.BLT; 31st Tactical Fighter Base), supported by Polish Mi-17 and Mi-24D helicopters and a Saab 340 airborne early warning and command (AEW&C) aircraft, intercepted the initial drones, while the Royal Netherlands Air Force (RNLAf) F-35As from Volkel based 312 and 313 Squadrons deployed to the same base (31.BLT) under NATO's Enhanced Air Policing

mission marked their combat debut by destroying targets and guiding Polish fighters. The incursions forced airport closures, civil defence alerts and a co-ordinated multinational response that underscored allied solidarity. More than a tactical engagement, the operation showcased Poland's frontline readiness, the integration of fourth- and fifth-generation fighters, and NATO's determination to defend its skies.

The incident also marked a historic milestone for the RNLAf. Since their arrival on August 29, 2025, four Dutch F-35As have been stationed at 31.BLT at Poznań-Krzesiny, flying side by side with Poland's F-16C/D Block 52+ 'Jastrząb' fleet. This forward deployment is part of NATO's broader effort to reinforce the eastern flank and demonstrate visible solidarity with frontline allies.

Dutch co-ordination

On the night of the drone incursion, two of these Dutch aircraft were scrambled on QRA alongside Polish F-16Cs. Although the Polish fighters provided the initial kinetic response, the F-35As' participation was crucial for detection, tracking and co-ordination. Utilising their advanced AN/APG-81 active electronically scanned array (AESA) radars and distributed aperture system (DAS), the Dutch jets were able to identify, classify and prioritise multiple drone targets at extended ranges, even when flying at low altitude and employing deceptive flight profiles.



The value of the F-35A lies in its ability to act not only as a shooter but also as a sensor node. The Dutch F-35As proved real-time targeting information to the Polish F-16Cs using the multifunction advanced datalink (MADL) and Link 16 networks. This allowed the Jastrząb pilots to engage threats with maximum efficiency, minimising the risk of redundant missile launches or missed targets. In at least one confirmed case, a Dutch F-35A detected a low-flying drone that Polish ground-based radars had difficulty tracking, cueing an F-16C from 31.BLT to intercept and destroy it with an AIM-9X Sidewinder.

According to operational reports, one of the two F-35As launched an AIM-120C AMRAAM, destroying a Russian Geran-2 drone before it could cross into central Poland. The missile engagement marked the first combat kill for a Dutch F-35A and, significantly, the first operational use of the Netherlands' fifth-generation fighters over NATO territory.

The other F-35A acted as a battlespace manager, providing situational awareness to both NATO's Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC) in Uedem and the Polish Saab 340 AEW&C orbiting over southeastern Poland. The aircraft's pilot encountered a radio system failure and performed an emergency landing. With support provided by an A330-243MRTT of NATO, T-059, which had refuelled the F-35As and F-16Cs, the aircraft returned to Poznan successfully.

NATO response

Although intelligence suggested the violation was unintentional, Poland – mindful of the deadly 2022 Przewodów incident – treated the threat as real. The CAOC assumed tactical control, fusing inputs from Polish ground-based radars, the Saab 340 AEW&C, Italian E-550A CAEW, and a NATO E-3A.

The political impact was immediate. Warsaw invoked Article 4 consultations which resulted in the launch of Operation Eastern Sentry.



While analysts concluded Russia had not deliberately targeted Poland, the violation of NATO airspace raised the risk of escalation. Brussels, The Hague, Berlin and Washington reaffirmed that allied skies would be defended against any future incursions, deliberate or accidental. For the Polish public, the crisis marked the first time mass alerts had warned of inbound drones, underscoring the war's proximity.

The incursion exposed Poland's vulnerabilities: its SkyCTRL counter-drone system remained delayed, Wisła Patriot batteries and Narew short-range defences were still incomplete and coverage in the east was patchy. As a result, Poland's defence relied heavily on manned fighters and NATO's integrated command and surveillance. Yet solidarity was immediate: Germany and Norway announced fighter rotations, the US raised alert levels and Italy reinforced airborne surveillance.

The lessons of September 9-10 are already shaping modernisation priorities. Plans to upgrade Poland's 47 F-16Cs/Ds to the F-16V standard, combined with the arrival of its own F-35As later this decade, will strengthen the air force's role at NATO's eastern flank. Ground-based Wisła and Narew systems will add depth, creating a multi-layered shield against both drones and missiles. Ultimately, the incident marked a watershed: the first shootdown of Russian drones over NATO soil. The safe return of Polish F-16s and Dutch F-35s symbolised the readiness, interoperability and deterrence of the allies, proof to Moscow that any violation of NATO skies would meet a united and decisive response. **Babak Taghvaei**

▲ An Iranian-built Shahed-136 one-way attack drone, manufactured under licence in Russia as the Geran-2. These drones were employed against Ukraine on September 9, 2025, with some crossing into Polish airspace Naser Abedini

▼ The Polish Air Force Saab 340 AEW&C aircraft that managed the battlespace before having to land due to a failed radio system Saab



Atlantic Eagles



One of the two Japanese F-15Js taxis to its parking spot on arrival at RAF Coningsby, with the support C-2 in the background
All images © Rich Cooper unless stated



▲ A JASDF F-15J pilot unstraps from his jet after the long journey across the Atlantic from Goose Bay, Canada

Between September 14 and October 1, the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) F-15J Eagles made history as they took part in a mission to Europe for the first time in the 71-year history of the Koku-Jieitai (the Japanese name for the air force). According to the Air Staff Office of the JASDF, the deployment was conducted “to deepen mutual understanding and enhance co-operation through unit-to-unit exchanges with the fighter squadron and other units visiting North America and Europe.”

Known as Atlantic Eagles, the operation saw the F-15Js and support aircraft visit multiple air bases, including Eielson AFB in Alaska, CFB Goose Bay in Canada, RAF Coningsby and Brize Norton in the UK and Laage Air Base in Germany.

The Atlantic Eagles deployment was announced on August 28, 2025, during the defence ministerial meeting between John Heale, Secretary of State for Defence of the UK, John Healey, and his Japanese counterpart, Gen Nakatani, in Tokyo, following the two-day Pacific Future Forum onboard HMS *Queen Elizabeth* moored at the Tokyo International Cruise Terminal. The aircraft carrier’s visit to Japan was part of Operation Highmast, a deployment to the Indo-Pacific region.

Gen Nakatani said the Atlantic Eagles deployment “embodies the common understanding that security in the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions is inseparable.”

Defence ties between Japan and Europe have increased in the last decade, with the country joining Italy and the UK in the Next-generation Global Combat Air Programme to produce a stealth fighter that will replace the Mitsubishi F-2 in the JASDF.

Deploying from Japan

Seven Mitsubishi F-15J Eagles from the 2nd Air Wing based at Chitose Air Base (AB), Hokkaido, departed on September 14. The four primary aircraft – s/ns



22-8936, 22-8939, 42-8946 and 82-8901– flew east to Eielson AFB, while three air spares returned to Japan. Logistical support for the fighters included two Kawasaki C-2s, comprising 58-1218 which is from the 402nd Tactical Airlift Squadron (TAS), 2nd Tactical Airlift Group (TAG) based at Iruma AB in Saitama Prefecture, and 28-1216 of the 403rd TAS, 3rd TAG at Miho AB in Tottori Prefecture.

In addition, tanker-transport support was provided by Boeing KC-767J (87-3601) from the 404th Tactical Airlift Tanker Squadron, 1st TAG, based at Komaki AB, Aichi Prefecture, and a KC-46A Pegasus (44-3613) of the 405th Air Refuelling Squadron assigned to the 3rd TAG. Some legs of the journey were also supported by Omega Air Refuelling Services' McDonnell Douglas KDC-10CF N264DE.

The UK Visit

An advance party landed at RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire on September 17 in Kawasaki C-2 s/n 58-1218. Around 180 JASDF personnel were involved in Atlantic Eagles.

Two of the four deployed Eagles – s/ns 22-8936 and 42-8946 – touched down at RAF Coningsby from CFB Goose Bay on September 18, 2025, and were subsequently hangared. Before the F-15Js touched down, they were escorted by RAF Eurofighter

▼ The two support Kawasaki C-2s, 58-1218 and 28-1216, rest in the low Lincolnshire light at Raf Coningsby

▼ With its fuel tanks displaying 'Atlantic Eagles', F-15J 42-8946 in full afterburner as it departed RAF Coningsby for Germany Key- Jamie Ewan

▼ RAF and JASDF personnel with the two visiting Eagles and two home-based RAF Eurofighter Typhoon FGR4s UK MOD Crown Copyright

Typhoon FGR4s. In the evening, the second C-2 also touched down at the Lincolnshire base. The KC-767J and KC-46A tankers landed at RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire, while the Omega Air Refuelling Services McDonnell Douglas KDC-10CF N264DE touched down at Glasgow Prestwick Airport.

Air Marshal Allan Marshall welcomed the deployment, stating: "The arrival of your fighters on UK soil is not only a milestone for the Koku-Jieitai, but also a powerful symbol of how far our partnership has advanced. This is not simply a visit, it is a demonstration of operational trust and shared purpose."

On September 23, 22-8936 and 42-8946 departed RAF Coningsby for Laage Air Base in Germany, the last stop for the Atlantic Eagles. Eagle 22-8936 lined up on the runway alongside Luftwaffe Eurofighter EF2000 31+04, while 42-8946 was accompanied by EF2000(T) 31+26. They were followed later by C-2 58-1218. The JASDF's tanker support departed RAF Brize Norton on the same day.

After their visit to Laage, the fighters and support aircraft commenced the long journey home to Japan. Hopefully, this deployment is the start of further deployments to Europe for JASDF aircraft as Japan looks to deepen its ties with nations within the continent. **David Willis**

AN



Anson Comes Home

September 7 saw the long-awaited return to British soil of the world's sole surviving, airworthy, Avro Anson Mk1. **Chris Gilligan** was there to witness its homecoming

After an absence from the UK of over eight decades, Avro Anson Mk1, MH120/OO-ANS attended IWM Duxford's airshow commemorating and celebrating the 85th anniversary of the Battle of Britain.

MH120/OO-ANS was built at A.V. Roe's Yeadon plant, near Leeds, during 1943 and was issued to the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) for use under the Empire Training Scheme. On charge with both No1 Air Observers School in New South Wales (NSW) and later, the Advanced Flying and Refresher Unit close to the NSW/Victoria border, it was a regular sight in the skies above the Australian continent throughout the second world war.

Following the allied victory, the aircraft passed into civilian hands, where in 1953 for just £100, it was purchased and operated by Greenfields Air Taxis of Albury NSW. Unbelievably, the aircraft also found civilian success as an air racer in 1971 and even went on to star in the Australian 1991 TV mini-series *Half a World Away*, a series telling the story of the famous 1934 MacRobertson Air Race. It was painted to represent Boeing 247D, 'Warner Bros. Comet' of pilot Roscoe Turner.

Subsequently grounded and exhibited at the Wangaratta Air World Museum in Victoria for 12 years, the Anson, now literally a shell of its former self, caught the imagination of helicopter pilot and businessman Bill Reid of New Zealand.

Life in New Zealand

After selling his helicopter business in 2002, Reid, alongside his partner Robyn, purchased the Anson and embarked upon an incredibly meticulous ten year restoration which would see the aircraft, then stripped of all military equipment as well as its original 'greenhouse-style' glazing, returned to its original wartime configuration and appearance, with it painted to represent K1683 'VX-B' of 206sqn RAF Coastal Command.

During the night of September 5, 1939, it was this aircraft that became the very first RAF combat loss of the war when it was shot down by return fire from a Luftwaffe He.115 just off the coast of the Friesian Islands. Of the four crew aboard, only New Zealand-born Plt Off LH Edwards survived. Upon completion of the restoration and ensuing successful return to flight as ZK-RRA, in 2012, the aircraft was based at Omaka Aerodrome where it regularly took to the skies to delight airshow goers across the country while also attracting admirers around the globe. One such admirer was Czech-born Richard Santus, pilot and vintage aircraft collector.

New owners

Richard is the founder of RAF Station Czechoslovakia, based at Podhorany airport just west of Pardubice, Czechia. Renowned for its impressive collection of airworthy, historic World War Two era aircraft, the

▼ Basking in the English sun, the Anson awaits its UK debut display slot at IWM Duxford
All images Chris Gilligan





◀ In this topside view, many of the meticulous restoration additions and attentions to detail can be seen

▼ Moments away from touching down on UK soil for the first time in over 80 years

organisation prioritises aircraft with significant connections to Czech pilots who joined the RAF after fleeing their homeland following Nazi invasion and occupation, and currently operate a number of Tiger Moths as well as an immaculate Miles Magister. With Richard acquiring the Anson in 2024, the aircraft made its long transcontinental voyage west, arriving in Belgium for reassembly by 'FAST Aero' before eventually arriving to its new home in Czechia in early June of this year. Having made its Northern hemisphere airshow debut at Aviatická Pouť (Aviation Fair) in Pardubice just a few days later, it was never going to be too long until *Faithful Annie*, as it was affectionately known throughout its service, graced British skies once more.

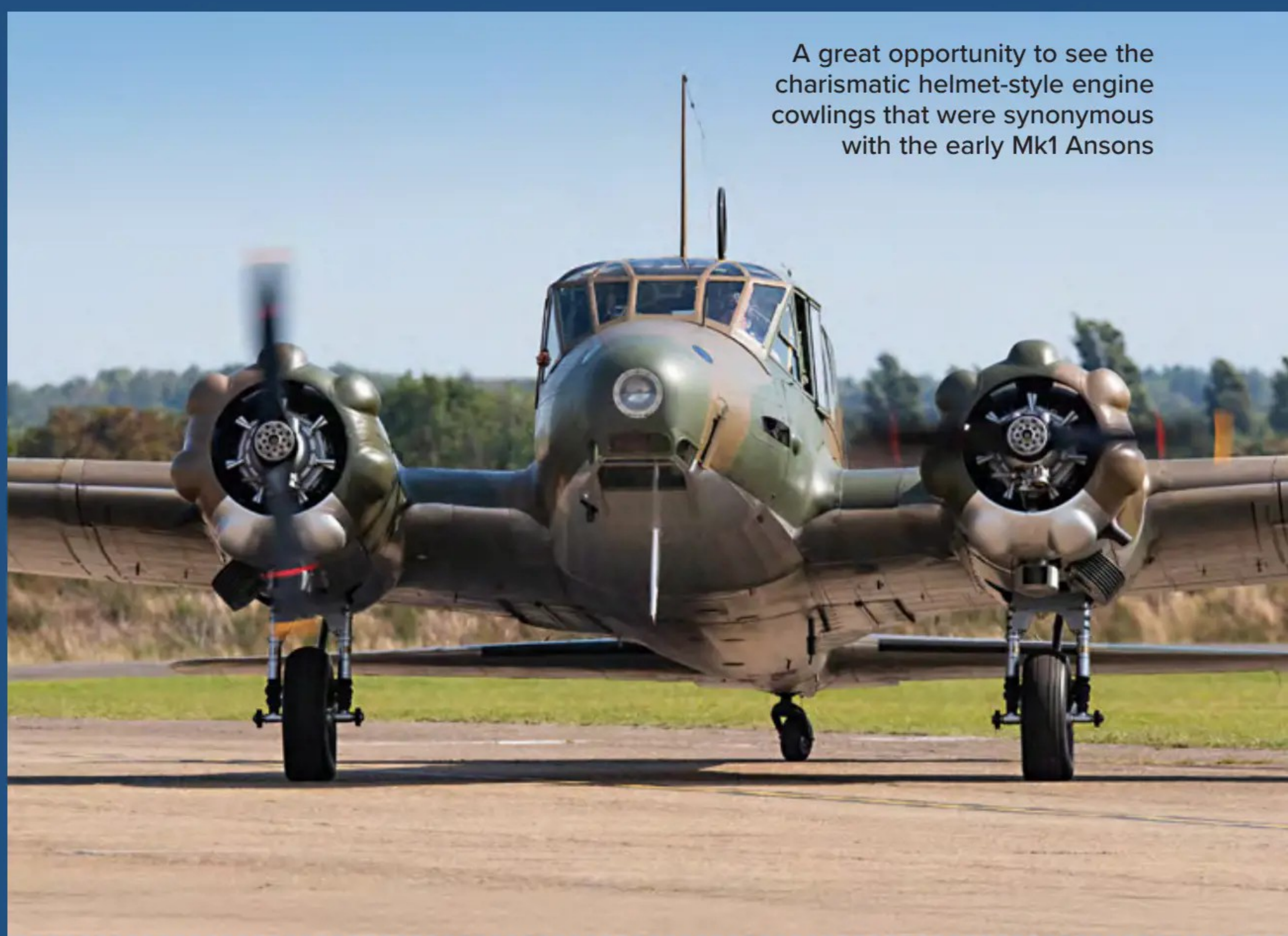
Homecoming

Announced by IWM Duxford just a few days before the show, the Anson drew tremendous fanfare and was watched with huge anticipation as it flew north across the English Channel, inbound to the historic airfield on the Sunday. The crew arrived dressed in suitable period attire to a huge round of applause and within minutes, there was a huge throng of onlookers and photographers surrounding the aircraft, looking to witness and capture this significant moment for themselves. A mere three hours after its arrival, the aircraft took to the Cambridgeshire skies for its UK display debut.

There to see it was 102-year old Norman Brown, a World War Two veteran who served as an RAF engineer on Ansons in England and South Africa throughout the conflict. Norman's emotional reunion with his beloved Annie is testament to the decades spent ensuring that this 'one of a kind' can serve as a flying tribute to all those who served on this often-overlooked aircraft in every corner of the world.

With a busy autumn airshow schedule across Europe ahead, let's hope fans won't have to wait for too long before they are treated to the sights and sounds of RAF Station Czechoslovakia's sole surviving, airworthy Avro Anson Mk1 over the UK once again.

AN



A great opportunity to see the charismatic helmet-style engine cowlings that were synonymous with the early Mk1 Ansons

Egypt's

Babak Taghvaei takes us inside the world's only Active IL-76MF Fleet and the shadowy fate of the prototype



▼ Egyptian Air Force IL-76MF 1331/SU-BTX departing Châteauroux Airport on August 23, 2024
All images Babak Taghvaei unless stated

Today, the Egyptian Air Force (EAF) stands as the world's only operator of the Ilyushin IL-76MF, a stretched and re-engined variant of the venerable IL-76 transport aircraft that never entered full production. With just two examples in service -1331/SU-BTX and 1332/SU-BTY of the 516 Air Wing at Cairo International Airport – Egypt has found itself the caretaker of a rare capability, one that provides vital long-range and heavy-lift transport capacity at a time when the country is expanding its regional military and humanitarian footprint.

Their missions range from delivering armoured vehicles and troops to supporting African Union peacekeeping efforts and disaster relief across the Middle East and Africa. Despite their small number and the difficulties of maintaining such an unusual type, the IL-76MFs remain strategically significant, filling a niche that Egypt's C-130H/H-30 Hercules fleet cannot.

The unusual fate of the IL-76MF fleet underscores both the potential and the limitations of post-Soviet aerospace innovation. Conceived in the 1990s as a

modernised successor to the IL-76MD, the IL-76MF promised greater payload, range, and compliance with international noise and emission standards thanks to its stretched fuselage and PS-90A turbofan engines with high bypass ratio. Yet only three were ever completed: the two now in Egypt and a prototype that has resurfaced in recent years for shadowy operation of Russian mercenary logistics. That leaves Egypt not only as the sole air force to deploy the IL-76MF in frontline service, but also as the custodian of a type whose rarity has become both its greatest asset and its most persistent challenge.

Technical capabilities and comparative assessment

The Ilyushin IL-76MF represents one of the most ambitious but ultimately under-realised attempts to modernise the Soviet Union's iconic four-engine military transport aircraft by the now defunct Tashkent Aviation Production Association.

The most visible change was the 6.6m fuselage extension, achieved by inserting two structural plugs fore and aft of the wing. This expanded the internal

rare giants



cargo volume to 400 cubic meters, about one-and-a-half times greater than the Il-76MD, and raised payload capacity from 48 to 52 tons, with testing up to 60 tons. The enlarged fuselage also enabled new passenger layouts, ranging from 217 troops in a single deck to 305 in a two-deck configuration, or 186 paratroopers for airborne insertion. These improvements required reinforced wings and landing gear to handle a higher maximum take-off weight of 210 tons, compared to 190 tons for the Il-76MD.

Equally important was the adoption of the Aviadvigatel PS-90A-76 engine, delivering 16,140kgf of thrust against the 12,500kgf of the D-30KP-2 on the Il-76MD. The new powerplants provided 30% more thrust and 15% lower fuel consumption, extending range by up to 20%: 9,800km ferry and 4,200km with a 60-ton payload. The PS-90A-76 also met ICAO Annex 16 Chapter 3 noise and emissions standards, a first for the Il-76 family, allowing access to international airports previously closed to older versions. While early reliability problems delayed flight testing, the engines ultimately gave the Il-76MF competitive efficiency and lower operating noise.

The avionics suite was also modernised. Multifunction displays replaced analogue instruments, reducing crew size by eliminating the dedicated radio operator. Navigation was enhanced by the Kupol-3 radar and Groza weather radar, while a re-profiled tail cone replaced the obsolete gunner's station, reflecting modern survivability doctrines. Electronic countermeasures antennas were fitted at the wingtips, and cockpit ergonomics moved closer to Western standards. Collectively, these changes gave the Il-76MF a more modern flight deck and improved operational flexibility.

Against the Boeing C-17A Globemaster III, the Il-76MF showed both strengths and weaknesses. The C-17A could carry up to 77.5 tons – about 50% more – and possessed short take-off and landing (STOL) capability, able to operate from runways as short as 1,000m. This gave it unmatched flexibility for forward deployments, something the Il-76MF could not replicate with its 2,500m requirement at maximum weight. The C-17A also featured fly-by-wire controls, a smaller three-person cockpit, and extensive global support infrastructure. By contrast, the Il-76MF

Egyptian IL-76MFs



▲ The IL-76MF prototype at Moscow-Zhukovsky Airport during MAKS-99. At the time it was still operated by Russian and Kyrgyz test pilots and engineers of the Tashkent Aviation Production Association Sergey Popsuyevich

▼ In the summer of 2024, Egyptian Air Force IL-76MF 1331/SU-BTX airlifted weapons – including MICA IR and EM air-to-air missiles for Rafale fighter jets – from Châteauroux-Centre ‘Marcel Dassault’ Airport to Cairo International Airport

offered lower acquisition costs, greater fuselage volume (400 vs 321 cubic meters), and higher troop capacity, with up to 305 soldiers compared to the C-17’s 134. In short, the IL-76MF was not designed as a peer competitor but as a cost-effective modernisation of the Soviet airlifter tradition.

Despite its promise, the IL-76MF never entered serial production. Maintenance support has proven difficult, with spare parts tied to Russian suppliers and limited MRO facilities worldwide. Egypt’s reliance on Tucano Aircraft Maintenance in Osh, Kyrgyzstan – where even overhauls are conducted outdoors due to a lack of hangar space – illustrates the logistical challenges. These limitations have resulted in lengthy downtimes, with one aircraft often grounded for months at a time.

In conclusion, the IL-76MF was a technically advanced but strategically orphaned design. It outperformed the IL-76MD in payload, efficiency, and international compliance, but it fell short of the C-17A in flexibility and sustainment. For Egypt, acquiring the type offered a unique strategic lift capacity at relatively modest cost, albeit with inherent maintenance burdens. The aircraft thus remains a rare example of post-Soviet innovation whose potential was never fully realised, but which continues to play a niche role in the EAF’s long-range transport operations.

Egypt’s IL-76MF fleet and fate of the prototype

The operational history of the Ilyushin IL-76MF is as rare as the aircraft itself. Each of the three built has followed a very different path.

The prototype, registered RA-76900, first flew on August 1, 1995. It was converted from an IL-76MD airframe with fuselage plugs and powered by the new PS-90A turbofan engines, making it the first long-range transport in the Ilyushin family to meet international noise and emissions standards. It quickly became a showpiece for the Russian aerospace industry, making appearances at MAKS 1995, Paris Air Show 1997, ILA Berlin 1998, and MAKS 1999.

Trials at Zhukovsky demonstrated payloads of up to 60 tons and successful parachute drops of armoured vehicles and troops. Despite these achievements, the Russian Air Force declined to procure it, citing lack of funds and the high costs of PS-90A engine support. With no domestic orders, the prototype was relegated to occasional commercial flights and





later returned to its birthplace at Tashkent Aviation Production Association in 2006, where it sat parked for more than a decade as the program stagnated.

The aircraft's sudden reappearance in 2023 drew international attention. After 17 years idle, it was ferried from Tashkent to Osh, Kyrgyzstan, to be overhauled for Wagner Private Military Company (PMC), taking up the identity TL-ART. Western intelligence linked the aircraft to Wagner Group operations in the Central African Republic, Mali, and Sudan. For a transport aircraft once displayed as a symbol of post-Soviet innovation, its eventual role in the clandestine logistics network of a Russian mercenary company highlights the unrealised potential and odd fate of this unique airframe.

▲ Egyptian Air Force Il-76MF 1332/SU-BTY landing at Paris-Orly on August 15, 2025, for a training mission. This sortie took place two months after the aircraft's return to service with the 516 Air Wing following an overhaul in Osh

▼ Il-76MF 1331/SU-BTX of the Egyptian Air Force landing at Paris-Orly during a training flight on January 20, 2025



If the prototype's career ended in obscurity, the two production Il-76MFs briefly offered the promise of strategic lift capacity for a Middle Eastern air force. In 2005, Jordan signed a preliminary agreement for two aircraft, with deliveries completed in 2011. Entering service with the Royal Jordanian Air Force (RJAF) and operated under Jordan International Air Cargo, they were painted in civilian schemes and used primarily for humanitarian missions, regional transport, and support of UN operations. However, budget limitations and shifting defence priorities led Jordan to ground them after only a few years of service. The fleet was put up for sale as part of a wider rationalisation of the RJAF's transport assets.

Egypt seized the opportunity. In July 2019, the two aircraft were transferred to the EAF and re-registered 1331/SU-BTX and 1332/SU-BTY. They were assigned to the 516 Air Wing of the 159th Air Division, based at Cairo International Airport, and operated by an Independent Heavy Flight Unit. For Egypt, which had long relied on a fleet of C-130H Hercules for tactical and strategic lift, the Il-76MFs offered a rare expansion in capacity. With their extended fuselage and more efficient engines, they could carry outsized loads, more troops, and fly longer ranges than the Hercules, providing Egypt with a strategic transport option previously lacking in its inventory.

From the outset, the Egyptian aircraft were tasked with long-range troop and equipment transport as well as humanitarian relief missions. Their range made them especially valuable for resupply flights to Africa and the Middle East, where Egypt plays a significant role both militarily and diplomatically.

Egyptian IL-76MFs



They also served in training flights to Europe, ensuring that crews remained proficient in international operations. On August 15, 2025, for example, SU-BTY flew to Paris-Orly on a training mission while its sister aircraft was in overhaul, underscoring Egypt's intent to maintain crew readiness despite the limited fleet size.

As mentioned, Egypt has been forced to rely on Tucano Aircraft Maintenance, a Kyrgyz company with facilities in Osh and Cairo. While line maintenance is carried out locally, heavy overhauls must be performed in Osh, where the lack of a suitable hangar means work is conducted outdoors in all weather conditions. This has resulted in prolonged downtimes. SU-BTY completed an overhaul in Osh on March 6, 2025, it was flown to Cairo on March 16 but further work kept it grounded until June 10, while SU-BTX has been in Osh since May 25, 2025, with its return due to take place in 2026. These extended

► A close-up view of the front end of SU-BTY after the overhaul in February this year.

▼ The IL-76MF prototype with its PS-90A turbofan engines at the Tashkent Aircraft Production Plant, shortly before the factory's closure, in 2005
Sergey Popsuyevich

▼ IL-76MF 1332/SU-BTY undergoing corrosion control inspection and repainting by Tucano mechanics in Osh in February 2025. The overhaul was performed outdoors, in rain and snow.

maintenance cycles mean that at any given time, Egypt has only one serviceable IL-76MF.

Despite such difficulties, the aircraft remain strategically valuable. Their ability to carry 52 tons of cargo, or even 60 in overload configuration, makes them indispensable for missions that exceed the capacity of the C-130H. The IL-76MF's presence also symbolises Egypt's pragmatic approach to procurement: securing unique capabilities at modest cost, even if it means accepting the risks of operating a rare type with limited support.

In summary, the IL-76MF is both a success and a failure. It succeeded in demonstrating that Soviet and Russian aerospace engineering could modernise the IL-76 to meet international standards, offering extended range, higher payload, and compliance with global regulations. It failed, however, to translate this technical achievement into sustainable production or wide adoption.

AN



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▲ The TEKEVER AR5 is the first of its kind and sits proudly in front of the company's hangar doors at West Wales Airport
All images Aviation News unless stated

From current conflicts and many headlines around the globe, it is hard to ignore that unmanned aerial systems (UAS) are in high demand in both military and government operations. As much so as the increase in utilisation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to increase efficiency and safety. A company capable of morphing these two demands together with top-level and adaptive products is TEKEVER.

Founded in 2001 in Lisbon, Portugal, and with a solid footprint in the UK, TEKEVER recently gained status as Europe's newest Unicorn, due to rapid expansion and major investments and involvement in the European defence sector.

TEKEVER and its innovative assets have served in many areas around the world in the last decade. Some examples are, the TEKEVER AR5 has aided operations of the UK Home Office to monitor migrants crossing the channel and illegal fishing activities. The AR5 has performed maritime surveillance in the Mediterranean for the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) in the French region and over the Gulf of Genova in support of the Italian Coast Guard. The AR3 served the Nigerian navy for the Deep Blue project to reduce piracy and other criminal activity within Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea. The AR3 was also contracted to a Canadian helicopter charter company to conduct pipeline

EYES

Aviation News had the honour of visiting TEKEVER at its newly acquired West Wales facility in the UK. We also sit down with Head of Training, Regulations and Accountable Manager Stewart Pearce.

inspections for oil and gas companies across harsh terrains and environmental conditions.

Proudly, TEKEVER has played its part in the defence of Ukraine since the invasion by Russia in 2022. The AR3 has surpassed 10,000 operational flight hours supporting critical intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) missions in the warzone. The AR3 has aided the destruction of over £3bn worth of military assets, including two of Russia's S-400 air defence systems.

A major unique selling point for the company is that the AR3 has undergone more than 100 design iterations since entering the front-line, due to the implementation of constant feedback from operators.

The AR3 is a rail launched UA. Here it is seconds away from launching on a test flight from West Wales.



ON THE UNKNOWN



AR3

Created in the 2014, the AR3 is a pneumatic rail launched UAS which can be launched from one location and controlled from another. The AR3 which has a carbon-fibre body has a wingspan of 4.2M and a length of 1.7M, a max take-off weight (MTOW) of 25kg with its payload capacity being 4kg. The AR3 has a flight endurance of 8 to 16 hours and can perform operations at ranges over 200km depending on payload. It can reach cruise speeds of 85 km/h with an altitude limit of 12,000ft. The AR3 has the addition of the VTOL capability and can be recovered

▲ The AR3 has racked up more than 10000 operational flight hours in Ukraine TEKEVER

▼ The AR3 pops its recovery parachute and heads to the ground to be recovered, repacked and reused

by a parachute system on landing. The AR3 can be configured with Electro-Optical (EO)/Infrared (IR) cameras, Signal intelligence (SIGINT) and Electronic Warfare (EW) systems, Automatic Identification Systems (AIS), VHF radios and other third-party integrations.

The missions the AR3 can conduct is more than impressive, from ISTAR missions, wide area surveillance, border protection, maritime surveillance, comms relay, pollution monitoring, infrastructure monitoring and artillery correction.

Ricardo Mendes, CEO of TEKEVER said in a press release "The AR3 has demonstrated its value in the most extreme conditions imaginable. At TEKEVER, we believe that innovation must be driven by real operational needs. Every flight, every mission, every lesson learned from Ukraine has been fed directly into the evolution of our platform,"

RAF Stormshroud

Recognised for its design, performance in conflict zones, long endurance and adaptability, the AR3 was selected by the UK MoD to support the next generation electronic warfare programme, StormShroud, delivered under the Royal Air Force's Autonomous Collaborative Platforms (ACP) programme.

The AR3 is integrated with Leonardo UK's BriteStorm stand-in jammer payload and will act to protect front line crewed RAF aircraft such as the Eurofighter Typhoon and Lockheed Martin F-35B. It will do this via disrupting enemy radar at range, enabling the crewed aircraft to operate undetected.





TEKEVER Factory Visit

StormShroud is operated by 216 Squadron at RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire. The RAF announced minimum deployable capability on May 2 this year.

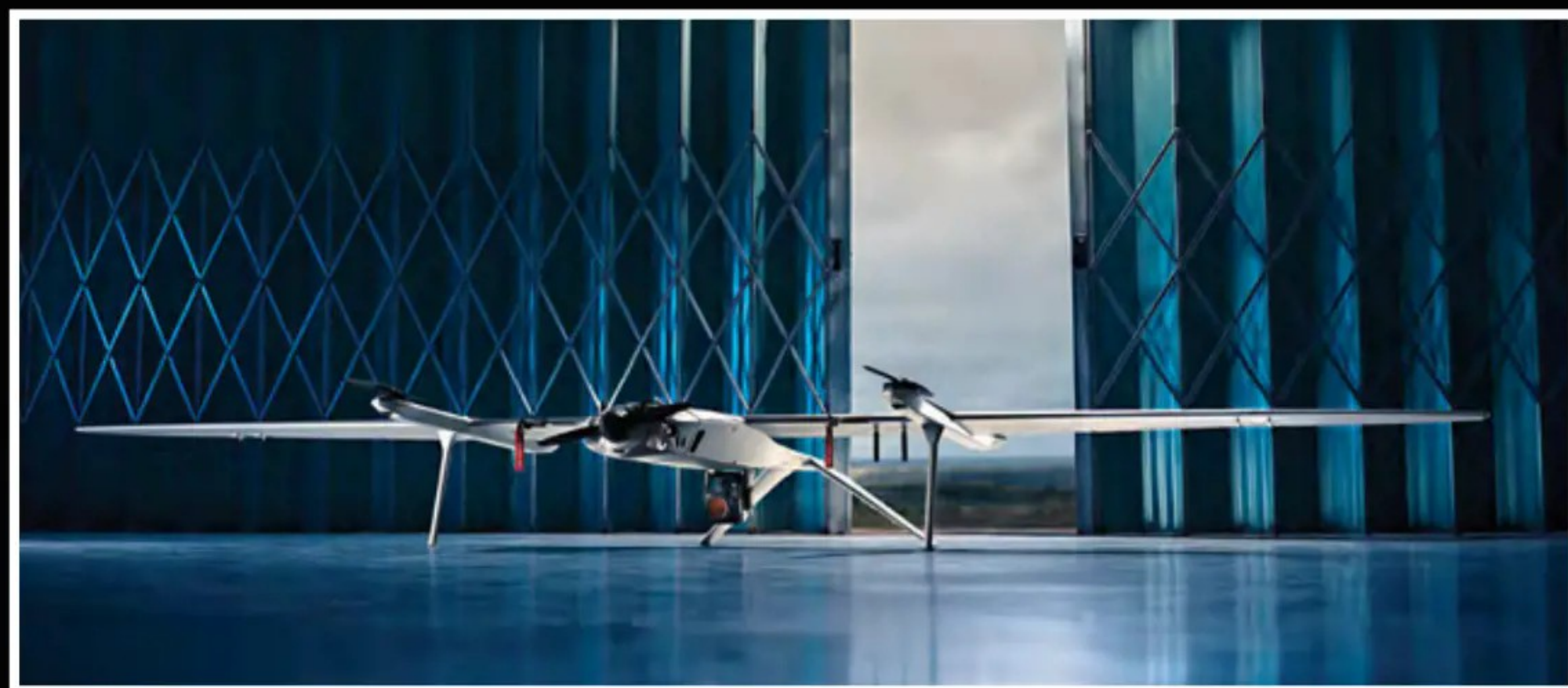
As well as building and testing the platform at its West Wales facility, TEKEVER have provided training to the RAF at its West Wales facility. The training was structured to ensure rapid operational readiness. It included several intensive multi-week courses, combining theoretical modules and live training. Trainees learned how TEKEVER's systems work, how to manage mission platforms and how to maintain and adapt equipment. The number of personnel trained, and exact structure remains classified for safety reasons.

AR3 EVO

With similar attributes to the AR3 and built via feedback from the Ukrainian frontline, TEKEVER announced at DSEI London 2025 the launch of the AR3 Evolution (EVO). This latest iteration of the AR3 introduces a new modular design, low-signature propulsion, resilient

▲ Two members of TEKEVER staff work on the AR5 at West Wales

▼ The AR3EVO is the latest version of the AR3 with VTOL capabilities. TEKEVER



▼ An AR3 StormShroud in front of the two main frontline fighter jets of the RAF UK Crown Copyright



communications and advanced navigation autonomy. A key feature is its unique shipborne capability that extends TEKEVER's operational reach and can launch and land in spaces as small as 5x5 metres – offering unprecedented maritime flexibility. The Modular design enables quick reconfiguration between missions and rapid turnaround for redeployment, while increases in payload capacity and endurance further enhance mission versatility and operational impact.

AR5

The AR5 is Europe's first UAS-based maritime surveillance system and the most advanced medium-altitude, medium-endurance (MALE) fixed-wing UAS in its class. It features conventional take-off and landing capabilities and is designed for persistent, wide-area missions including maritime safety, border protection, environmental monitoring, fisheries inspection, whale migration, and pollution detection.

It integrates EO/IR cameras, maritime radar, AIS receivers, satellite communications, and emergency beacon antennas, enabling beyond line-of-sight missions across vast maritime domains. The AR5 has already been deployed as mentioned by the UK's Home Office and EMSA under the €30m REACT contract with national authorities across Finland,



The AR5 automatically deploying a liferaft TEKEVER



Estonia, Latvia, Spain, Portugal, and Italy. The AR5 supports AI driven lifeboat deployment with the Italian Coast Guard.

The AR5's conventional runway-based design, while not requiring a paved surface and able to operate from unprepared grass strips, allows for greater payload capacity of 50kg and a MTOW of 180Kg, endurance of 20 hours, an unlimited comms range using SATCOM and a cruise speed of 100Km/h. By reducing mechanical complexity, it supports multiple advanced sensors simultaneously and sustains longer missions, making it ideal for multi-agency maritime operations.

A unique feature of the AR5 is that it is capable of automatically deploying a life raft on SAR missions to people in distress at sea. Using AI to consider weather conditions and flight plan restrictions the AR5 calculates the optimal time to release the raft close to either a vessel or person without any human interaction needed.

The AR5 has been developed and refined over more than a decade of continuous innovation, proven effective through numerous EMSA contracts and operational partnerships with coast guards and navies across Europe.

Compared to conventional crewed ISR aircraft, the AR5 delivers persistent coverage, AI-enhanced automation, and lower operational risk and cost, while being deployable across multiple geographies simultaneously.

OVERMATCH

TEKEVER has launched OVERMATCH, a five-year programme backed by a £400m investment in research, infrastructure and defence technology development in the UK. The initiative is set to create 1,000 highly skilled jobs while transforming the UK's defence industry and ensuring the UK and its allies remain at the forefront of autonomous, AI-driven technologies. When sitting down with Stewart Pearce, he told Aviation news "Part of the reason we have chosen to expand in the UK is because of the incredible talent pool here."

In July, the company purchased West Wales Airport in Aberporth to expand it into a national hub

▲ The full life cycle of the TEKEVER AR3 takes place at its West Wales facility

for testing and evaluation of UAS. The company absorbed all West Wales Airport employees, so no jobs were lost. The site has already supported test flights for the UK Home Office, the RAF and the Royal Navy. On top of domestic, the site is available to international clients. However, the facility is actively supporting ongoing work with the UK government stakeholders, allied forces, and industrial partners.

When asked why West Wales was chosen as a TEKEVER facility, Pearce replied "the site is unique in terms of providing access to 2,500 square miles of restricted airspace over land and sea and is one of the most secure UAS testing airspaces around Europe. We work with many government clients in the UK who occasionally require research and development (R&D) to be carried out in the UK for national security purposes. We firmly believe that great technology companies can be built outside of London and Cambridge."

The 2,500 square miles airspace is managed in coordination with UK authorities to ensure safe integration of military, civilian, and unmanned operations. The controlled environment allows TEKEVER and partners to test cutting-edge technologies with high operational realism.

Since 2023, TEKEVER has been operating from West Wales for R&D activities on its platforms, following ten years at its Southampton site. With 45 staff on site, West Wales now oversees the full lifecycle of the AR3 — including R&D, assembly, system integration, development of critical components, testing and maintenance.

The volume of AR3s produced is unshareable but the company did tell Aviation News that production is currently being scaled up in line with customer demand, and West Wales is playing an important role in enabling rapid delivery timelines through local manufacturing and integration capabilities.

When Aviation News visited West Wales, the AR5 was undergoing flight trials and integration work. Specific details about the test flights could not be disclosed due to operational security. Pearce added "since all TEKEVER systems continuously evolve from lessons learned and developments identified in real operational contexts. Its presence in Wales

▼ A TEKEVER engineer runs checks on the power source of the AR3





▲ TEKEVER personnel in the control centre prepare for a test flight of the AR3

reflects our commitment to scale our activities within the UK and expand real-world operational testing across multiple mission profiles.”

Also witnessed during the visit was a heap of training within the hangar. Training in West Wales is delivered by TEKEVER’s operations teams, which includes experienced instructors with significant experience in military, civil and industrial operational contacts. New staff are then deployed to support operational contracts across the UK and abroad or integrated into ongoing programmes in TEKEVER.

Swindon facility

The latest investment, which is part of OVERMATCH came on September 15, when the company announced it will have a fourth UK facility. That being in Swindon, specifically the 254 000 square foot Spectrum building. It is planned to be refurbished and open by summer 2026. The Swindon site is projected to be the core production site of the AR5, bringing its production to the UK for the first time. It will aid in the scaling of production for the AR3 and AR3 EVO.

The sites’ location between London and Bristol will allow TEKEVER to better reach suppliers and serve customers. The sites proximity to Wroughton and the Wiltshire microlight centre, means validation flights can be undertaken at the centre. Discussing the new site, Karl Brew, TEKEVER Head of Defence Unit, said: “We are proud to contribute to the economic development of Swindon, a town with a strong manufacturing heritage and capability for much more. Our new facility will not only increase TEKEVER’s capacity to innovate and meet the rapidly evolving needs of our clientele but also enable our business to operate more efficiently as we continue to scale our ambitions in line with our fervent commitment to transforming the UK’s defence industry into a leading powerhouse on the global stage.”

With defence spending rising and geopolitical threats growing, demand for AI-driven autonomous systems is growing and set to grow further. It is no doubt that TEKEVER is a company allowing decision makers in government and military leadership to meet this demand. TEKEVER’s UAS are more than just aircraft, they are super computers that gather vast amount of data and use AI to make sense of it all. They can make key decisions and perform missions that would be unsafe to conventional crewed aircraft. The constant adaptability and development of those platforms allowing them to deliver cutting-edge capabilities constantly to emerging threats brings bright light to the defence world. TEKEVER’s huge investment via OVERMATCH also brings a bright light to the UK Defence Industry as the acquisitions will deliver long-term regional benefits, including the creation of skilled jobs and opportunities for local businesses and talent to contribute to next-generation defence technologies.

AN



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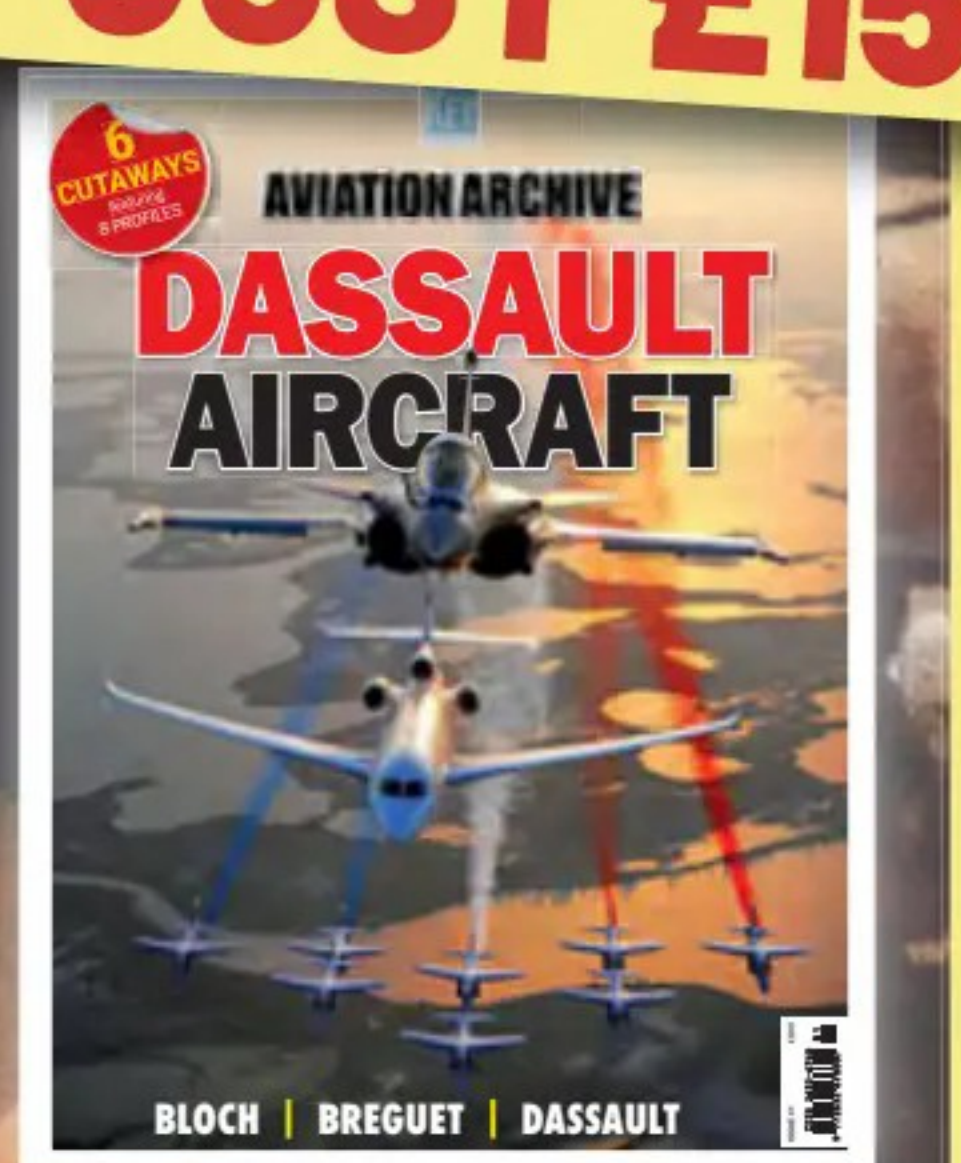


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AVIATION

A Royal Air Force Eurofighter Typhoon FGR4 with No. XI (F) Squadron markings flies over Ullswater, Cumbria, in LFA-17 of the UK Mike Henry





Honouring



Each September, to coincide with Battle of Britain Day on September 15, the Imperial War Museum Duxford holds a two-day airshow culminating with a mass launch of Spitfires and Hurricanes in the 'Big Wing' finale.

This 85th anniversary of the Battle of Britain edition had all the promises of a classic, with no less than eight Hawker Hurricanes slated to be flying together. It was said that this would be the largest number of Hurricanes flying together since the Portuguese Air Force retired their examples in the early 1950s. Also, as expected at a Duxford airshow, a large number of Spitfires were present and in the flying display.

Before the show began, a couple of items which would certainly be considered stars dropped out, namely the Bréguet 1050 Alizé from Alizé Association and the Junkers Ju-52/3m F-AZJU from Amicale Jean-Baptiste Salis. It was a testament to the strength of the lineup that come Saturday September 6, when the flying display sheet was handed out with the programme, that even with those losses, it still looked like a stellar line up.

While the flying display at Duxford didn't start until 1pm, that would not be the first movement of the day. Classic Wings and their fleet of de Havilland Dragon Rapides, Tiger Moths and Harvard gave a

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The Few

This year marked the 85th anniversary of the Battle of Britain, and the first in which there was no living member of Churchill's 'The Few' to celebrate it, making Duxford's perennial late summer show even more poignant. **Ben Stanley Hall** ventured to Cambridgeshire to capture the atmosphere

steady stream of people flights to remember. Also, with several other airshows that weekend, a number of attendees, as well as other Duxford residents departed and arrived throughout the morning.

The airshow proper got under way at 1.05pm with Marcin Kubrak's Douglas A-26C Invader, NL4313 (44-34313), departing, followed by eight Hawker Hurricanes. While the Hurricanes formed up, the Invader provided a punchy display before one of the highlights. They arrived from the right as a formation of five in vic followed by three in vic, making several passes before breaking into land. For me, it was a real shame that two of the highlights were early in the display, when then sun is in the worst possible position for photography.

Next to take off was a Hispano Buchon, masquerading as a Bf-109. The Buchon departed and went straight into several strafing passes, accompanied by pyrotechnics. With Duxford under attack, a trio of Spitfire Is scrambled to handle the interloper. After

several formations and tail chases, the 109 was duly dispatched, complete with the expected plume of white smoke to signal the kill. After this excitement, it was meant to be the CAC CA-13 Boomerang and Yak-3UWP replicas from Warbird Display Team in Belgium. Unfortunately, the Yak was a no-show, allegedly due to a paperwork issue. The Boomerang's rarity made up for the lack of its stablemate, but its lack of size and presence left its display wanting a little.

From here on in, it all got a little messy as the crosswind played havoc with proceedings. Firstly, we lost the trainer formation of a Miles Magister M14A, DHC-1 Chipmunk and a pair of Tiger Moths. The Magister and Chipmunk did take off, but instantly landed, whereas the Tiger Moths didn't get up at all.

The P-40C Warhawk was lost out of the Curtiss formation, replaced by the Fighter Collection's Martlet, although only the P-40F Warhawk and Curtiss Hawk 75 flew, with the Martlet taxiing back due to the crosswind.

► Eight Hurricanes sharing the same sky was genuinely stirring. Not since the early 50s has it been witnessed
All images Ben Stanley Hall

Duxford Battle of Britain Airshow



Next to fall victim to the crosswind was the First World War formation of a Fokker Dr1 and de Havilland DH9, a particular sting with the DH9 up for sale and its destination very much in the air, unlike the aircraft itself. The Mercury Formation, of a Blenheim I, Lysander III and Gladiator II was decimated to just the Blenheim, although in the hands of John Romain, that is often enough.

The ubiquitous B-17 'Sally B' was up next, with its 'friends' Ultimate Warbirds P-47D 'Nellie' and Fury FB11, although none of the three actually flew together, with the B-17G displaying first, followed by the Fury and then the Thunderbolt, which was a shame. The only modern item on the display was a NH-90NFH from the Belgian Air Component's 40 Squadron based at Koksijde. The medium helicopter provided a search and rescue demo, honouring the 28 Belgian pilots who lost their lives during the Battle of Britain.

Next up was a trio of Mustangs consisting of Fighter Aviation Engineering's P-51D 'Jersey Jerk', Warbird Experiences' P-51D 'Moonbeam McSwine' and Biltema Aviation's F-51D 'Miss Rebel', the latter hadn't been seen in UK skies since 2010. Unfortunately, we didn't get all three together, with 'Moonbeam' operating alone and the other two as a pair. Next was an interesting formation of Plane Sailing's PBV-4A Catalina 'Miss Pick Up' and Navy

► The modern Belgian Air Component provided this NH-90NFH, RN-03, to honour the fallen Belgian airmen during the Battle of Britain

▼ This Invader had only arrived in Europe under a month prior, but its already seemingly become a stalwart on the UK display circuit

► Biltema's Cavalier F-51D was a welcome part of the display. This Mustang is a combat veteran of the El Salvador Air Force, taking part in the so-called 'Football War' with Honduras

▼ Aero Legends' two-seat Spitfire Tr.IX, leads out two other Spitfires as a quick-fire departure of 23 warbirds commences

Wing's Fairey Swordfish Mk I, before both broke into their respective displays.

After the fairly sedate nature of the Catalina and Swordfish, we moved on to the only jet-powered aircraft of the show, with Mistral Warbirds' CL-13B-6 Sabre and the Norwegian Air Force Historical Squadron's Vampire FB.52, which gave a single, fairly loose pass, before breaking into their respective displays. The Comrades, with their Yak18T and a pair of Yak-52s where the next item. While it was a nice display, I felt it should have been towards the start of the display, but I'm sure there was a valid reason why it was placed where it was. The penultimate item was the BBMF's Lancaster. Its new routine, which sees crowd rear arrival and



There are few places on earth you could find 22 warbirds in formation and only one which consists solely of Spitfires and Hurricanes



departure the same way, adds presence to a pretty sedate display, which is understandable with the airframe about to go into a heavy maintenance period.

The finale, as always, was a mass launch of Spitfires and Hurricanes. On this occasion, we were blessed with 22 aircraft, including seven of eight earlier Hurricanes (the Czech-based one had already departed) and 15 Spitfires, ranging from the baby Mk1a all the way up to a late-war XVIe. While they got this mammoth formation together, Steve Jones played joker in the Buchon. After three or four passes en masse, the formation broke into two parts before breaking in to land.

With Duxford being a regular airshow venue, the logistics are well prepared and well-rehearsed, if still a little overwhelmed at times. Parking, for the most part, is on the north side of the airfield, with the bulk of it being situated on the grass to the north of the Officers' Mess, with an overflow to the north-west of the airfield. VIP and other premium parking are situated in the Museum car park and disabled parking is behind the Land Warfare Hall.

Although one of the better-connected airshow venues, with the M11 at the end of the runway, Duxford has historically had issues for visitors getting in and out of the venue, whether it be long tailbacks or excessively long waits for the shuttle

▼ 'Phooey' is the only airworthy (replica) CAC CA-13 Boomerang in Europe, seen here providing a nice topside pass

▼ Mistral Warbirds Canadair CL-13B-6 Sabre, piloted by Frederic Akery diving in from the M11 end, showing off those classic Sabre lines

▼ No Duxford airshow would be complete without 'Sally B'. Here groundcrew are vigilant as her four engines are started

bus. On this occasion, when I departed at 6.25pm, there were no traffic queues and the line for the shuttlebus though long, seemed to be moving at pace with several buses waiting to embark passengers.

If the weather hadn't decimated the line up, this could well have been one for the ages. In the end, it was an excellently put together show that delivered in what it promised. The flying was generally a little high and distant, but that can be chalked up to the on-crowd wind. Whatever shortfalls beset it, the sight of eight Hurricanes in the air together and then 22 of them with the Spitfires in the finale, will be what the crowd will remember fondly. A spectacle fit for 'The Few'.

AN



RISE OF THE

The Rockwell B-1 experienced a troubled birth, but today it is probably the USAF's premier long-range conventional strike platform. **David Willis** covers the creation of the B-1A and its cancellation, the rebirth as the B-1B and then the supersonic bomber's combat debut

The genesis of the B-1 – nicknamed the 'Bone', for B-One – dates to the frostiest days of the Cold War. In early 1962, a proposal to transit the North America RS-70 Valkyrie to a full-scale weapon system programme was rejected, with US Defence Secretary Robert S McNamara directing Strategic Air Command (SAC) to pursue an alternative bombing system. The Valkyrie, designed to fly at Mach 3 at 70,000ft, where it was immune to interception by Soviet Air Defence Force (PVO) fighters, was believed to be vulnerable to that service's increasingly dense surface-to-air missile network. The solution for SAC's existing bomber force was to change tactics, abandoning high-

level penetration of hostile airspace for low-level approaches, decreasing the range that the radars used to cue missiles able to detect the aircraft. It was not the operating altitude for which the B-52 Stratofortress was designed.

The alternative was to rely on intercontinental strategic ballistic missiles (ICBMs). However, this approach had a serious drawback: once they were in the air, the ICBMs could not be stopped. The Cuban Missile Crisis in the second half of October 1962 highlighted that manned penetrating bombers still had merit. They added flexibility to the nuclear deterrent – deploying them could signal resolve, while they could be recalled after launch should a last-minute diplomatic solution be found.



'BONE'

During the early 1960s, numerous strategic bomber studies were undertaken as SAC struggled to find a replacement for the B-52. They started with the Subsonic Low-Altitude Bomber (SLAB), completed in 1961, then progressed to the swing-wing Extended Range Strike Aircraft (ERSA), followed by the Low-Altitude Manned Penetrator, completed in August 1963, the Advanced Manned Penetrator (AMP) until January 1964 and then the Advanced Manned Precision Strike System (AMPSS). AMPSS studies were undertaken by Boeing, General Dynamics and North America by August 1964, but the addition of a high-altitude capability that year saw the name being amended to Advanced Manned Strategic Aircraft (AMSA).

Selection

McNamara was adamant that a new heavy bomber was not needed and that ICBMs would suffice, limiting funding for AMSA throughout his term as defence secretary, which ended on February 29, 1968.

Towards the end of his appointment, he favoured upgrading the B-52 and acquiring large numbers of General Dynamics FB-111s for shorter-range missions.

His replacement in the Richard Nixon administration, Melvin R Laird Jr, cut the number of FB-111s and recommended accelerating AMSA studies. In early 1969, it was announced that AMSA would be SAC's new heavy bomber and, that April, it became the B-1A, the first aircraft in the bomber category of the post-1962 tri-service Mission Design Series.

► A 9th BS B-1B takes fuel from an RAF Mildenhall KC-135 AAR tanker during a Bomber Task Force mission in Europe Aviation News

Rockwell B-1 Lancer



▲ A refuelling boom operator's view of the first B-1A with wings full forward. The first in-flight tanking occurred on April 10, 1975, which was also the date of the first supersonic flight, when 74-0158 reached Mach 1.05 USAF

A request for proposals (RfP) was issued to industry on November 3, 1969, calling for a variable-geometry, turbofan-powered aircraft. It would be equipped with a terrain-following system, an advanced cockpit, an offensive avionics suite and integrated self-diagnostic equipment. It was expected to fly at Mach 0.85 at low level and up to Mach 2.25 at 50,000ft.

During January 1970, Boeing, General Dynamics and North American Rockwell responded to the RfP, while General Electric and Pratt & Whitney competed to create the turbofan.

On June 5, 1970, North American Rockwell's D481-55B was declared the preferred design. The company established the B-1 Division to build five flight test aircraft and a pair of non-flying structural test airframes. It was expected that 240 B-1As would be acquired, the first flying in October 1977, with deliveries to begin in mid-1979. General Electric would power the aircraft, receiving a contract to design and build a full-scale engineering mock-up of the F101-GE-100, two XF101-GE-100 prototypes and 40 YF101-GE-100s for service trials.

From October 18, 1971, USAF representatives inspected an engineering mock-up of the B-1A built at El Segundo in Los Angeles, California. Made nearly entirely of wood, the starboard side was open to allow inspection of the interior, while the port wing could pivot throughout the full range of angles. The inspection generated 297 requests for alterations, most of which were quickly incorporated.

By then, the flight developmental fleet had been cut to three aircraft, while one of the static testbeds had been dropped and the number of engines reduced. This helped reduce cost, as high inflation had lowered the purchasing power of the dollar, while the unit cost of a B-1A, estimated at \$40m in 1970, began to increase. It would reach £70m five years later.

Into the air

Assembly of the first B-1A (74-0158, AV-1) took place at Site 3, Air Force Plant 42, at Palmdale, California. It made its debut in front of an invited audience on October 26, 1974, when it was rolled out of Building 301/301A at Palmdale.

Progression to first flight was swift by modern standards. On December 23, 1974, B-1 Division chief pilot Charles C Bock Jr, with USAF Col Emil 'Ted' Sturmthal (director of the B-1 Joint Test Force) in the co-pilot's seat, plus flight test engineer Richard Abrams, lifted the bomber off the runway at Palmdale for its maiden flight. One hour and 18 minutes later, the prototype landed at the Air Force Flight Test Center at Edwards AFB, California.

B-1A AV-1 completed 24 sorties in 1975, confirming flight and handling characteristics, evaluating flutter, expanding the flight envelope, performing initial low-level tests and basic weapons carriage, such as cycling the bomb bay doors while carrying eight inert AGM-69 short-range attack missiles. Highlights included the first supersonic flight on April 10, also the date of the first air-to-air refuelling; and the initial low-level sortie on September 19 (500ft over the Pacific at Mach 0.75), going down to 200ft over the Edwards runway on November 11 and reaching Mach 1.6 at 50,000ft 15 days later.

On April 1, 1976, AV-3 (74-0159) joined the flight test programme, completing a maiden flight of 4hrs 54mins, fitted with the offensive avionics systems. The second aircraft (74-0160) followed on June 14, having completed eight months of structural tests. By September 1976, the three aircraft logged 339hrs and 55mins between them, by which time the initial operational test and evaluation had been passed. On December 2, 1976, it was announced the B-1A would enter production.

Cancelled

During his 1976 presidential campaign, the Democratic candidate, James E 'Jimmy' Carter, described the bomber as "wasteful of taxpayers' dollars". When he assumed office as the 39th president, he ordered a review of the programme. One of its conclusions was that development of Air Launched Cruise Missiles (ALCM) for the Boeing B-52 promised to greatly increase the chances of the old bomber defeating Soviet defences to hit its targets. Proceeding with ALCM had the advantage of being much cheaper than acquiring 240 B-1As.

President Carter cancelled the production programmes for the B-1A and its General Electric F101 engine on June 30, 1977, citing the increasing cost and a desire to reduce tension with the Soviet Union. It was only after the B-1A had been axed that he was fully informed about development of low-observable technology. Work on a 'stealth bomber' did not gather momentum until 1978. It was viewed as a long-term solution to the need to penetrate heavily defended airspace: the B-1A was not cancelled in favour of what would become the Advanced Technology Bomber (ATB).

The cancellation of the B-1A did not remove SAC's need for a new bomber in the short-term. From November 1979 this requirement became the Long-Range Combat Aircraft (LRCA), which was expected to have an initial operating capability in 1987.

President Ronald W Reagan began his first term in the White House on January 20, 1981, after defeating the incumbent President Carter. He repeatedly pledged to improve America's military might – "peace through strength" – during his election campaign. On June 1, 1981, in a report delivered to the president, the US Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, Congress and the US Air Force recommended that the Rockwell LRCA be selected as its new multi-role strategic bomber over a stretched and re-engined version of the General Dynamics FB-111. It also wanted to continue research and development of the ATB, although at that point it was far from clear if the project would lead to an operational bomber.

President Reagan announced the Strategic Modernization Program on October 2, 1981, including the procurement of 100 LRCAs, to which the designation B-1B was allocated.



▲ B-1A AV-4 (76-0174) was one of two of the aircraft to be fitted with a large dorsal spine containing electronic countermeasures. Cancellation did not end the flying career of the B-1As, which continued as insurance against the need to develop a new manned bomber USAF

At the conclusion of its first flight on October 18, 1984, the first B-1B, 82-0001, landed at Edwards AFB, California, having departed Palmdale in the Mojave Desert, where it had been assembled. Initial operational capability (IOC) was reached on October 1, 1986, by which time the 96th Bomb Wing had received 15 B-1Bs.

The last production aircraft rolled out in January 1988, with the fleet sitting out the last years of the Cold War on nuclear alert duties. As the prospect of a nuclear war between the superpowers diminished and SAC itself disappeared, the bomber began to adopt the conventional strike role. While other USAF aircraft were called upon to fight in the conflicts of the early 1990s, B-1B crews had to wait to demonstrate their capabilities.

Thunder postponed

It was just under two decades after it had been ordered that the B-1B would be used in anger,

On November 11, 1998, the Pentagon had announced that, among other assets, six B-1B Lancers would deploy to Thumrait Air Base in Oman, as part of a build-up of forces for Operation Desert Thunder. The operation was in response to the refusal of the Iraqi leadership to co-operate with the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) on October 31, 1998. Saddam Hussein backed down on November 15, just 14 minutes before B-52H Stratofortresses were due to launch AGM-86C conventional air-launched cruise missiles (CALCM) against Iraqi targets, while other assets were also in the air.

After the operation was cancelled, some aircraft remained in theatre, including four B-1Bs, two each from the 7th Bomb Wing (BW) at Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, and the 28th BW at Ellsworth AFB, South Dakota, assigned to the 28th Air Expeditionary Group at Sheikh Isa Air Base in Bahrain. Planning for strikes continued in case of ongoing Iraqi intransigence under Operation Desert Fox.

The operation was launched in response to the failure of Saddam Hussein to comply with United Nations Security Council resolutions and its interference with the UNSCOM teams hunting for weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Iraq had long played a game of brinkmanship with the teams, blocking access to certain sites, only to back down when force was threatened. Targets to be hit were related to weapons programmes, including research

▼ The crew of B-1B 86-0102 under the nose of the aircraft on December 19, 1998. From left to right: Captains John Martin, Joe Reidy, Jeffrey Taliaferro and Randy Kaufman of the 37th Bomb Squadron. Just visible under the cockpit side window is a single bomb marking, under the title Operation Desert Fox Lt Col John Martin via USAF



Rockwell B-1 Lancer

sites and depots, as well as air defence systems and locations associated with the Republican Guard. The final target list comprised approximately 100 sites or facilities, although only 11 were related to WMDs.

Seeing combat

Patience with the Iraqi regime ended one month after Desert Thunder had been called off. On December 15, UNSCOM chairman Richard Butler reported to the UN Secretary General that Baghdad was still not co-operating. The following night, nearly 250 ship or submarine-launched Tomahawk land-attack missiles, plus 40 sorties by aircraft from the carrier USS *Enterprise*, struck more than 50 targets, many associated with Iraq's air defences, command and control facilities, airfields and other military infrastructure.

This opened the way on the second night for B-52Hs, operating from Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, to launch CALCMs, the combat debut of the missile. Also participating for the first time were B-1Bs, 86-0096 *Wolf Pack* of the 37th Bomb Squadron (BS), 28th BW, and 86-0135 *Watchdog* from the 9th BS, 7th BW, which departed Sheikh Isa Air Base at 2330hrs. Escorted by carrier fighters and Grumman EA-6B Prowlers, the swing-wing bombers headed for the barracks of the Al Nida Republican Guard at Al Kut, 100 miles southeast of Baghdad. They crossed the Iraqi border at 26,000ft and 550mph.

On the way to Al Kut, the strike package navigated around an SA-2 *Gainful* surface-to-air missile site. Al Kut was defended by a pair of SA-3 *Goa* batteries, but although their radars were activated, they were quickly shut down to avoid destruction by anti-radiation missiles. A large volume of anti-aircraft artillery rounds arced below the bombers as they approached the target. Reports say that 188 Mk 82 500lbs unguided bombs were released from seven miles out; apparently 20 of the 63 500lb weapons carried by one of the B-1Bs failed to release. The bombers returned to base around 0700hrs the following day.

Commenting on the use of 'dumb' bombs at a press conference the next day, the vice-director for intelligence for the Joint Chief of Staff, Admiral Thomas R Wilson, said: "It was the old way, although it's hard to beat a load of bombs sometimes."



▲ Mk 82 bombs fall away from a B-1B during a test drop. The bomber can carry the heaviest payload of any USAF aircraft

Rockwell

The crew walked a stick of bombs across the Al Kut barracks, successfully hitting and destroying sections of each building on the target list."

The third night of the campaign saw *Watchdog* and *Bad Moon Rising* (86-0102, aka *Moon Doggie*, of the 37th BS) strike an oil refinery outside Basra, again escorted by naval aircraft. (The fourth aircraft deployed was 85-0067 *Wild Thang* of the 9th BS.) One aircraft from each wing reportedly flew a sortie the following day, but may not have deployed weapons.

A further pair of B-1Bs, 85-0084 *Pandora's Box* of the 28th BW and 86-0109 *Spectre* of the 7th BW were prepared for deployment to the Middle East. Both departed the US on December 20, the day after Operation Desert Fox concluded.

After dropping a total of 94,000lbs of weaponry, all six B-1Bs had returned to their respective home bases by the end of 1998. During an interview with USAF Global Strike Command recounting the mission, retired Col John Martin, one of the 37th BS aviators for Desert Fox, said: "It was a surreal moment. At the time, it was tough to grasp the importance of the mission. We just cranked the jets, blasted off, bared our fangs and put steel on target like we had trained to do so many times while at Ellsworth [South Dakota]."

The combat debut of the B-1B was a big deal for crews of the bomber. Having been forced to sit out the 1991 Gulf War due to ongoing technical problems and its commitment to the Single Integrated Operational Plan, Desert Fox proved the bomber could play a role in limited conflicts. It justified funds to improve conventional strike capabilities and paved the way for subsequent operations, including over Kosovo in Operation Allied Force in 1999, Operation Enduring Freedom over Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The B-1 continues to take part in many global operations such as Bomber Task Force missions across the globe.

AN

▼ The first B-1B (82-0001) outside the Rockwell International facility at Palmdale, California, on the day prior to its official rollout. The B-1Bs were assembled in a new facility across the runway from where the B-1As were built

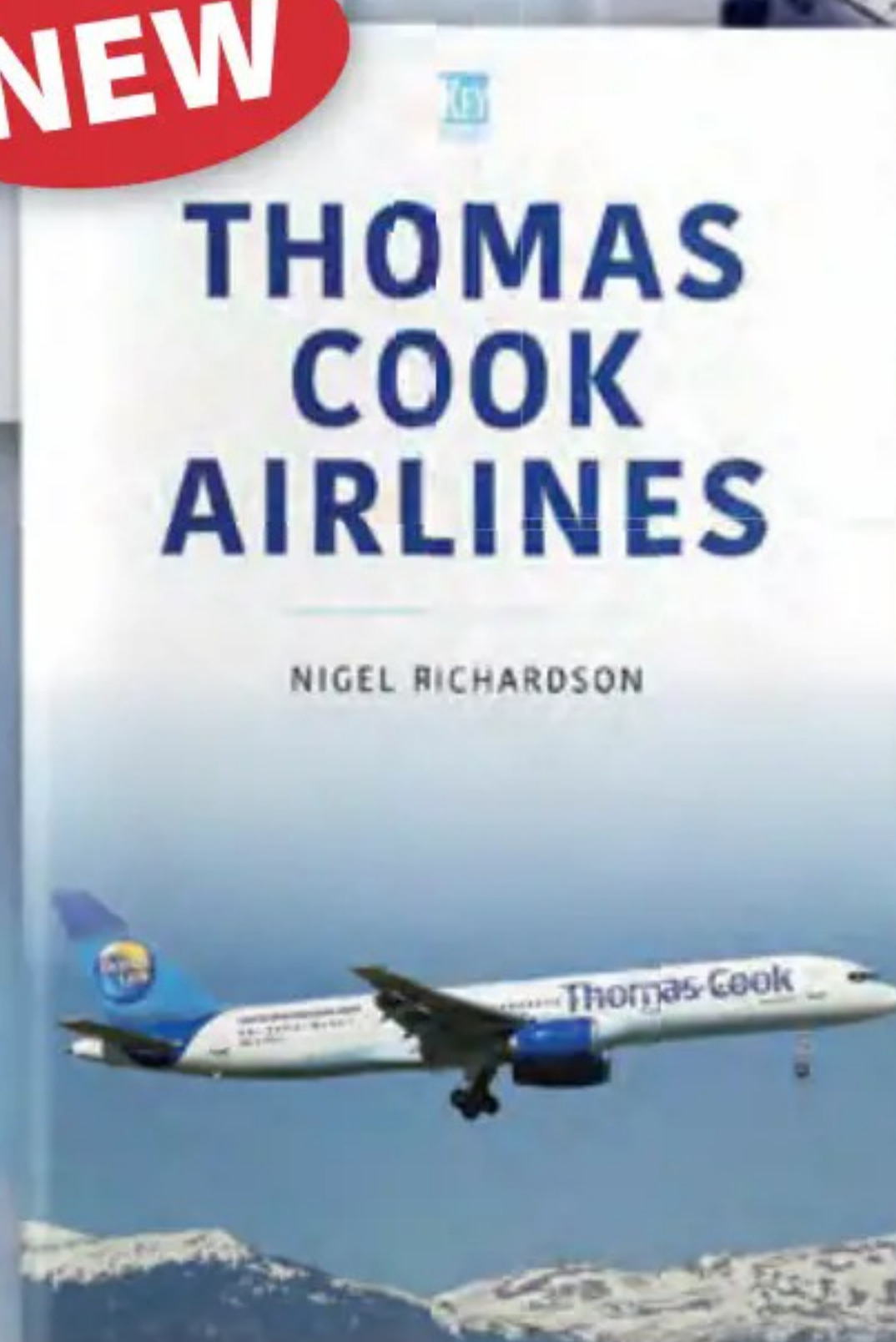
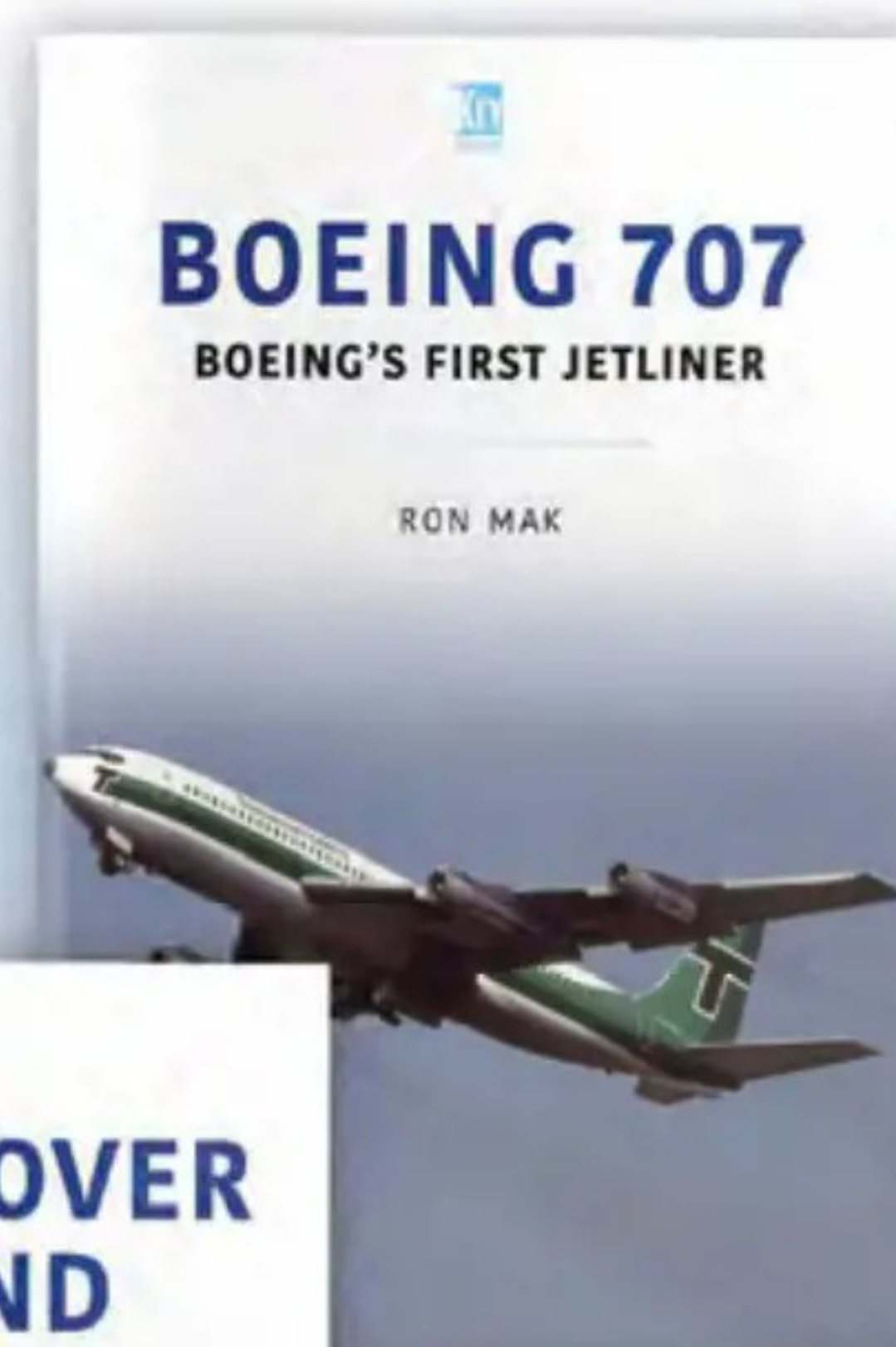
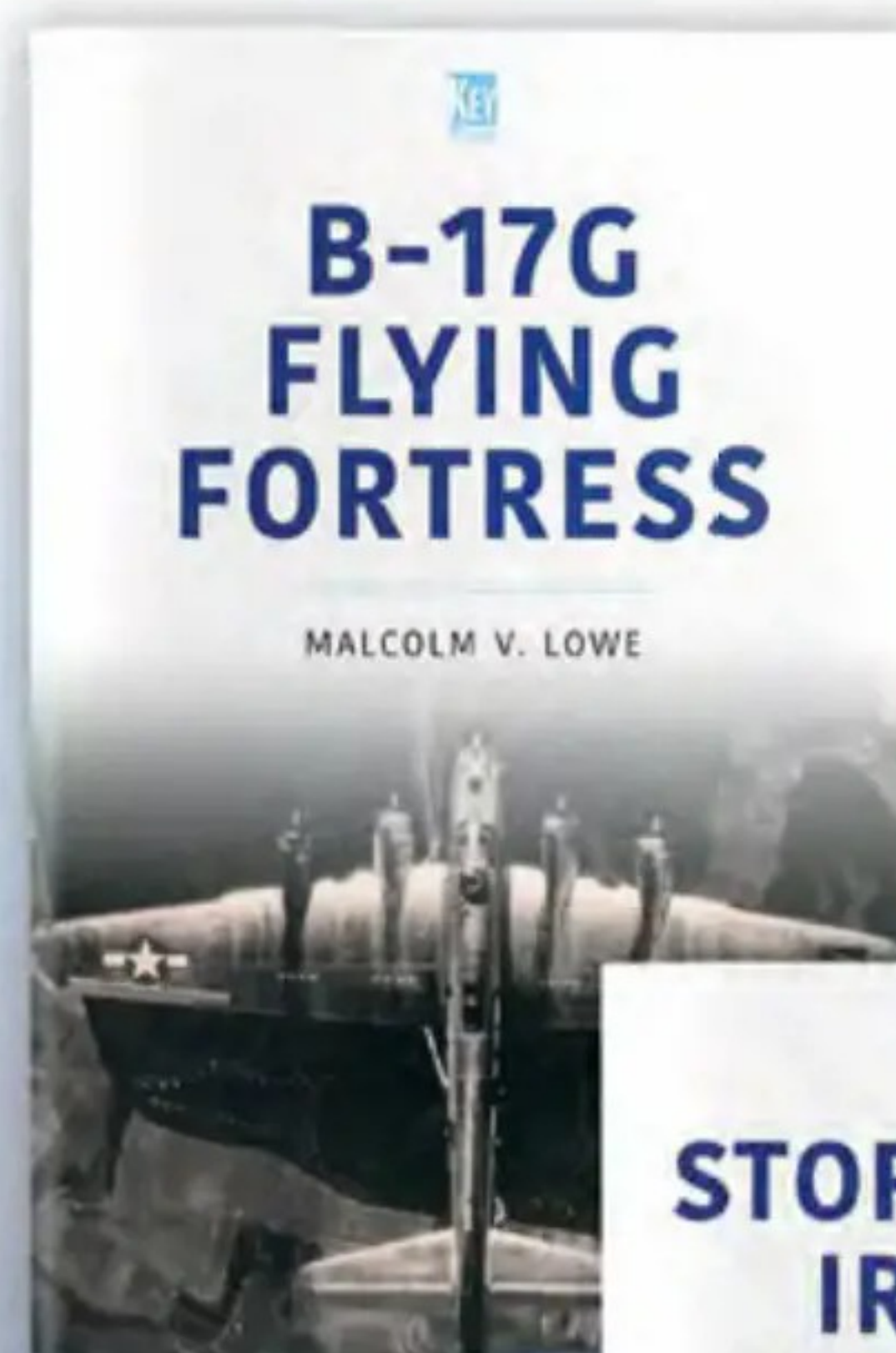
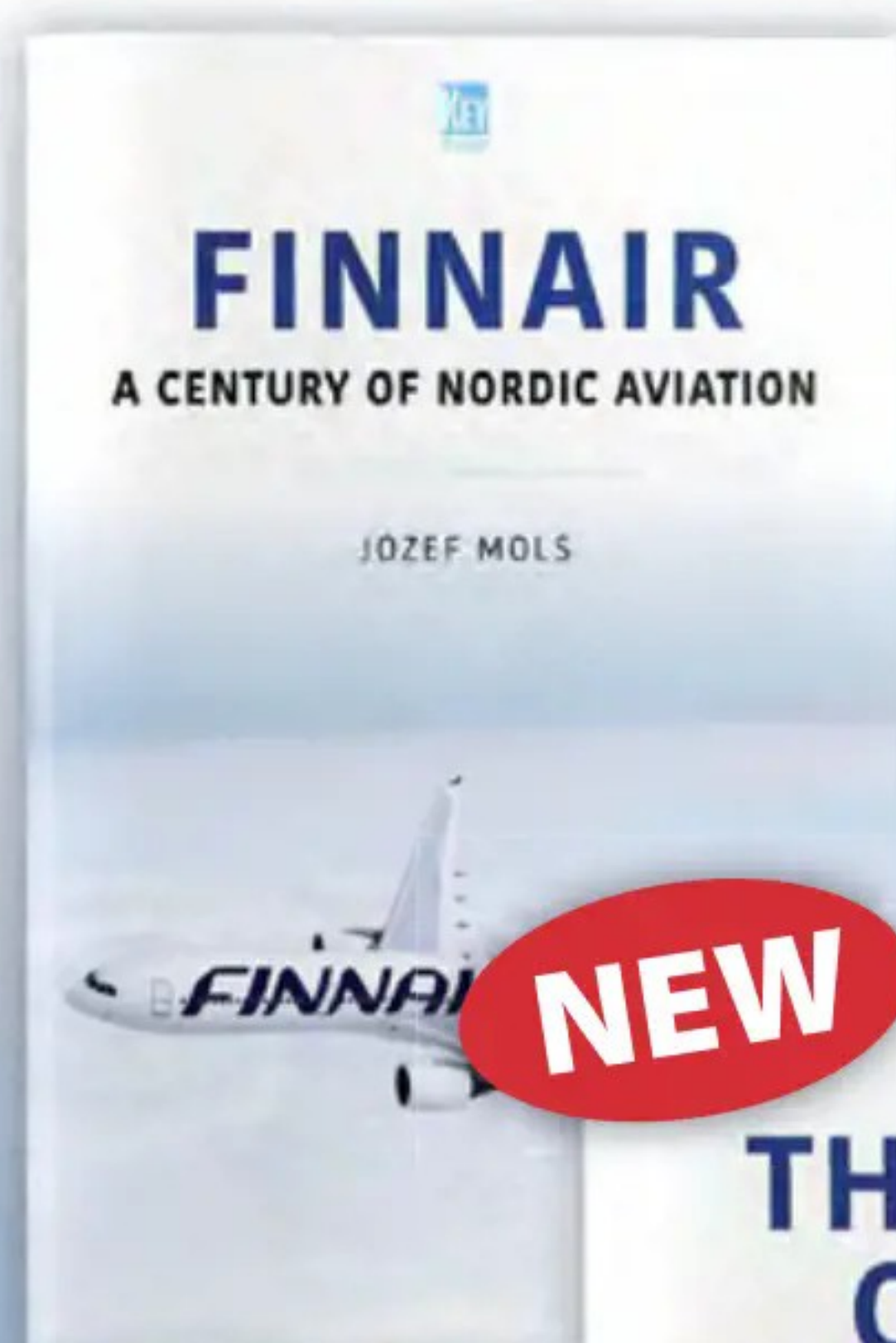
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Xena is built on over 20 years of operational expertise with a tight-knit team of seasoned aviators having accumulated thousands of flying hours in the most austere and challenging conditions. The air company is a subsidiary of the Expedition Aviation Group, a mission-aviation specialist providing full-service solutions primarily in the field of humanitarian or disaster relief. Group CEO is Roman Milesenko, a veteran pilot who served his country flying in Ukraine's Naval Aviation units, during which he consequently gained experience operating detachments overseas for multinational air exercises and

peacekeeping operations within Africa and the Middle East.

Following his time in the military, Milesenko continued to organise and manage aviation programs in the commercial sector. He said: "When I established Expedition Aviation in 2015, we obtained our first contract supporting the African Union mission in Somalia, for which we provided helicopters and fixed wing aircraft to support peace keeping forces. Of course, in this region of the world there was nothing better for the job than Antonov aircraft as they can operate unsupported and land on unpaved strips. We didn't have an Air Operators' Certificate (AOC) at the time, so we hired another operator who flew Antonov An-26's on our behalf, however we found it difficult to achieve excellence not having control of the maintenance and operational aspects."

▲ Dropping water on the flames of a wildfire whilst the setting sun barely manages to penetrate the thick smoke
All images Stewart Marshall

Ukraine's fire killers

Since their establishment in 2019, Xena LLC, a subsidiary of Expedition Aviation based in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, has achieved success and continued growth thanks to their highly experienced team and unique aerial firefighting assets. **Stewart Marshall** spoke with their CEO Roman Milesenko and joined their team on firefighting operations

Ukrainian Fire fighters



Realising the way forward was obtaining and operating their own aircraft, the company purchased their first Antonov 26 and achieved a Ukrainian AOC. Shortly after, they successfully won contracts for the United Nations, French and German governments, operating on their behalf in Africa. The increased workload brought on by these projects led to exponential growth from 1 to 12 Antonov An-26s within three years, along with numerous Mi-8 and Mi-17 type helicopters on strength. The company later leased Antonov An-74's and over time have accumulated vast experience operating all the medium-size Antonov models in these niche markets.

By 2019, Expedition was eyeing other specialised markets in which they could apply their esteemed Antonov aircraft. The opportunity soon arose to acquire an Antonov AN-32 (UR-UZH) under auction which had been converted to the water bomber 'An-32P Fire Killer' variant. This An-32P was remarkably the ex-Antonov Design Bureau demonstrator, serial number 2901 which was previously registered as UR-48086 and wowed audiences at the Moscow and Malta Airshows in 1995

▲ A mix of old and new technology on show within the navigator's position located behind the pilots. A series of Garmin navigation and communication systems were installed as part of the An-32P modification

▼ Being 'refuelled' by an airport fire truck at Çanakkale Airport. Designated Airfields are used where there is a ready supply of fuel and water during firefighting operations

soon after its production. The airframe saw sporadic firefighting use in tandem with worldwide airshow appearances up until 2012 when it was stored at Gostomel Airport near Kyiv. It remained parked up here for years until it was finally picked by Expedition in 2019.

Fire killer run down

The Antonov An-32 was initially produced at the request of the Indian Air Force, equipped with powerful Ivchenko AI-20D engines. The larger AI-20 engines provide a telltale visual difference over the older Antonov An-26 model with the nacelles being mounted high above the wing to protect the propellers from foreign object damage (FOD) on rough airstrips. This design also allows the An-32 to operate more effectively in high altitudes and hot, adverse weather conditions, with improved high-lift wings and better take-off performance than the An-26. The improvements have enabled operations in ambient air temperatures up to +55°C (131°F) and airfield elevations up to 4,500m (14,763ft) above sea level.

Converting a standard Antonov An-32 transport aircraft into the An-32P firefighting variant involves fitting it with specialised external tanks for water or retardant along with a release system controlled by the pilots. Four tanks are installed with a combined capacity of 8,000 litres which can be filled in less than five minutes through a range of applications. Modifications to the cabin are also carried out as it remains fully functional despite the additional tanks being added. The interior overhaul includes new lighting, panel walls, windows, floors, seat tracks, and intercom systems which makes it truly multi-role, laying the foundations to enable quick role conversions. The rear ramp is modified to accommodate paradrops of up to 27 smokejumpers and their equipment, which are highly trained wildland firefighters who parachute into remote areas to combat wildfires in the early stages. It can alternatively accommodate





up to 24 stretchers to evacuate injured personnel or up to 6,700kg of general cargo. An impressive internal crane fitted to the ceiling of the cabin allows items up to 3,000kg to be lifted from the ground up onto the rear ramp.

The An-32P has undoubtedly brought more unique capabilities to the company's growing fleet. Being no strangers to the Antonov models and their Ukrainian aviation heritage, Expedition would normally have had no issues inducting the new aircraft, however Mileszko recalled this new acquisition brought a new set of challenges despite their in-depth experience of the Antonov types. He said: "When we purchased our first An-32P, we became the only civilian operator of the type worldwide. Even though the civilian certification to operate the aircraft has existed since 1995, there were no current pilots or mechanics certified on the type meaning it took quite some time to train up personnel to operate it. Alongside these challenges there was also the requirement to modernise the onboard avionics to meet ICAO standards for operations worldwide. The new company established for aerial firefighting, Xena LLC, had to effectively start from the ground up which took two years before we reached a point where we were finally ready to tender for contracts."

When Xena was finally ready to get underway, Turkey was coincidentally going through a very tough firefighting season and were eager to bring in more support from overseas. Xena quickly positioned their An-32P to assist.

▲ Overflying a massive wildfire burning near Çanakkale in northwest Turkey. An orbit was performed around the fire to determine the best route to conduct the water drop

▼ 8000 litres of water is released in seconds from the external tanks. The low level drop at speed results in an area 160 meters long and 35 meters wide being covered. Fabian Zuba

Turkey operations

In Turkey the General Directorate of Forestry (Orman Genel Müdürlüğü – OGM) is the national authority responsible for wildfire fighting. It operates only a limited fleet of firefighting aircraft – The AT-802 Fireboss and the S-70i helicopter built on licence by Turkish Aerospace Industries. The OGM is therefore allocated a budget worth hundreds of millions each year to contract fixed- and rotary-wing firefighting assets which are operated by private international companies which descend on the country from as far as the United States and Russia's Siberian region.

In 2021, Xena received an emergency contract from the OGM to base their aircraft at Dalaman Airport on Turkey's southwestern coast. During the peak summer months that year a series of more than 200 wildfires burnt 1,700sq km (1,056sq miles) of forest in Turkey's Mediterranean region in the worst-ever wildfire season in the country's history. The wildfires had overwhelmed the Turkish authorities who requested assistance from their allies, enabling an opportunity for Xena to penetrate a well-established market shortly after their first aircraft was declared ready for operations.

Each day of the fire season the Xena aircrew assemble at sunrise at their base within the grounds of Dalaman Airport, positioned only metres from the aircraft so they can respond at a moment's notice should they be called upon. They remain in situ through until sunset every day. The OGM headquarters in the Turkish capital monitor the country with a fleet of Bayraktar drones, Bell 429 helicopters and Beechcraft 350ER Kingairs which are kitted out with advanced infra-red cameras to detect the thermal energy or heat emitted by emerging fires. If the OGM tasks the Xena crew, they are contracted to have wheels rolling on the tarmac within 20 minutes of the call.

Captain Oleh Maksimov, a seasoned An-32P pilot, provided an overview of the preparations which proceed the request to respond: "When the request comes through, we receive the co-ordinates of the wildfire that we feed into 3D modelling software which



Ukrainian Fire fighters



▲ The Xena technicians conduct line maintenance during the evening and early morning to ensure the aircraft are ready during daylight hours

▼ 'Tanker 1' UR-UZH Arriving back at Dalaman under darkness. On this occasion the aircraft had been detached to Bursa and Çanakkale for four days due to major wildfires in these areas

enables us to pre-plan an ingress and egress route to conduct the water drop by reviewing the terrain for any potential obstacles. The drop itself occurs only 40-60m (130-195ft) above ground level so it's crucial we're well prepared. We also conduct the flight planning and weight calculations to determine whether we can travel to the fire and drop directly from Dalaman or if we need to land at an airport nearer the scene to fill up. We can be called upon to respond to fires anywhere in the country so we could have up to 90 minutes transit time to take into consideration."

The An-32P requires a crew of three comprising two pilots and a navigator, however on firefighting operations a flight engineer and two technicians also fly with the aircraft as they could be detached to different locations for days at a time if there's a significant fire ongoing. The crew could be subjected to gruelling shifts conducting water drops for 12 hours straight so it's vital that there's personnel

on hand to keep the aircraft in good working order. The OGM also assigns a Turkish pilot who flies onboard every contracted aircraft to manage communications and contribute to flight safety. The OGM pilot will assist with the flight planning to look out for NOTAMS (Notice to Airmen) or military airspace restrictions which might impede their routing. Additionally, they will communicate with OGM representatives on the ground or onboard surveillance aircraft who control air traffic and instruct which area requires intervention as the fire progresses.

Despite their thorough planning and experience, Maksimov admits that there's still clear and present dangers to be given careful consideration: "The most significant danger to us is the smoke produced by the fires, firstly if we were to fly into smoke the visual impairment can cause us to lose track of obstacles and disorientation not being able to see the horizon. The other concerning factor is high density smoke can cause the engines to be starved of oxygen and stall which is of course extremely dangerous at low level. Due to these significant risks, we will never fly through smoke but will survey the direction in which it is travelling and plan accordingly to keep a safe distance.

"We also need to keep good visual awareness when working severe fires as there could be ten or more aircraft responding and working in close vicinity. The OGM do a good job co-ordinating the traffic, however it can be difficult with so many different nationalities and languages working together, so other aircraft can sometimes inadvertently cross our direction of flight so we're always monitoring visually and on TCAS (Traffic Collision Avoidance System) in case we need to manoeuvre."

Between June and September 2025, the persistent Xena crews detached to Turkey have conducted 370 water drops on wildfires all over the country.



Preparing a resilient future

The Xena team has proven themselves as an effective asset in combatting wildfires throughout Turkey with the Fire Killer being more cost efficient and productive than some of their western competitors. Their success has been represented in the company being contracted in the country through until the end of summer 2028.

Following their second successful season in Turkey, Xena decided to expand with a second An-32P although once again it wasn't straightforward as there were no converted firefighting models on the market. Their next acquisition was found 12,000 miles from their native Ukraine – a 1991-build An-32A which was being operated by Peruvian carrier ATSA (registration OB-1962-P). The ferry flight from South America was conducted in September 2023 with stops in Colombia, Bermuda, Canada, Greenland, Iceland, Scotland and Czechia. Due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the aircraft couldn't be delivered to the company's headquarters in Zaporizhzhia, instead they positioned the aircraft to Trenčín in Slovakia, from where the conversion to the firefighting variant was undertaken by Letecké opravovne Trenčín, a.s. (LOTN), a local maintenance and overhaul shop which was already undertaking the requirements of Expedition Aviation's An-26 and An-74 fleet. The aircraft's overhaul and conversion process were completed by May 2024, with the required parts from Antonov having to be shipped by road from Ukraine. The second aircraft, UR-UZQ, was immediately dispatched to Turkey from where it has been contracted on an ad-hoc basis.

In August 2025, Xena received a contract to deploy an An-32P to Montenegro which was struggling with unprecedented wildfires across the country. The contract has been fully funded by the government of the UAE up until October 2025, with the option to reinstate support for the entire 2026 summer period. These latest developments for the company attest to the recognition and growing confidence in their



▼ The Orman Genel Müdürlüğü (Turkish General Directorate of Forestry) patch on the crew's uniform alongside the Ukrainian flag

offering. Wildfires are becoming more common in many parts of the world, particularly in the form of extreme and destructive events that have more than doubled in frequency since 2003. This trend is largely driven by climate change meaning the services provided by Xena will only be more sought after in years to come. Xena have already acquired a third aircraft (UR-UZR) which can be swiftly converted should a new opportunity appear on the horizon. Their analysis indicates that there are over 90 An-32 airframes around the world which could be acquired and converted allowing them to grow to fill the needs of the future. AN

The author would like to thank Roman Mileshko, Kseniia Bukshyna and Vlad Baliuk for their assistance in producing this feature.

▼ UR-UZQ is prepared to leave Turkey for a new contract in Montenegro. The cabin can accommodate all their spares and support equipment needed for long-term detachments



Dubai Police Air Wing

Located between Dubai and Abu Dhabi, Al Maktoum International Airport is home to the elite Dubai Police Air Wing (DPAW). With a fleet of state-of-the-art Leonardo/Agusta-Westland AW139s, DPAW is ready to respond to any emergency call at a moment's notice. This elite unit, serving the Emirate of Dubai, is prepared for anything, responding to calls ranging from police assistance to rescues in the desert, or search and rescue operations in open waters.

The Dubai Air Wing, comprising the Dubai Royal Flight and the DPAW, began operations in 1972 with the Bell 206 Jet Ranger and later added two Bell 205s. Initially conducting VIP operations, the helicopters would occasionally assist the police

until the early 1980s, when the air wing changed administration, falling under the direct control of Dubai Police Headquarters. The DPAW then began operations with the larger Bolkow Bo-105 (P-793), adding the winch capability and the benefit of a larger internal structure.

In November 1995, the Agusta Westland A109K2 (C/N 10024) was inducted, followed by another (C/N 10026) in July 1996 and a third (C/N 10030) in November 1997. These were registered as DU201, DU202 and DU203, respectively, along with an Agusta-Bell 412 (DU-323). The year 2019 saw the arrival of the new Agusta Westland AW139s, with the first two entering service in March, replacing DU201 and DU202, and the third arriving later in the year, replacing DU203.



DESERT GUARDIANS

Flying their adapted AW139 helicopters, the Dubai Police Air Wing is equipped for anything, from providing police assistance on land to desert rescues, or search and rescue operations in the mountains. **Shrey Chopra** flew with the DPAW to find out more



► Air Wing operations run together with commercial operations at Dubai's Al Maktoum International Airport. Constant collaboration with air traffic control prioritises the Dubai Police Air Wing during emergencies All images Shrey Chopra

◀ Dubai has a challenging topography with a mix of urban, sea, deserts and mountains which presents a number of challenges for rescue missions

Dubai Police Air Wing



▲ The Dubai Police Air Wing owns a fleet of three state-of-the-art Agusta-Westland AW139 helicopters. The twin-engine helicopter is powered by two Pratt & Whitney PT6C-67C turboshaft engines

▼ The Dubai Police Air Wing is based at Dubai's Al Maktoum International Airport, between Dubai International and Abu Dhabi

Always busy

In 2019, the current AW139s were introduced. With a fleet of three, each of the helicopters features a multi-role configuration to cater to the diverse mission profiles. Each crew covers a 24-hour shift, from 8am until 8am the next day, followed by 48 hours of rest. While ready to respond to any call, most of the wing's call volume is made up of emergency medical services (EMS) assist and search and rescue (SAR) in the desert. The high call volume, attributed to EMS, stems from the lack of dedicated EMS air services within the United Arab Emirates as a whole.

The AW139s are fully equipped with an EMS suite to respond to urgent medical cases. Staffed by a paramedic provided by the Dubai Ambulance Service, the helicopter can land on or alongside

roads, or on makeshift landing zones cordoned off by police, to provide quick care to those who require it. While there are multiple options on the market, the DPAW chose the EMS suite provided by the US firm Air Methods. This suite enabled the Police Air Wing to modify the kit to suit its own specifications and needs, including the requirement for only a single operator and to allow the helicopter to be fitted out for police work simultaneously.

Other features of the helicopters include the TrakkaBeam A800 searchlight, a rescue hoist, the Star Safire 380 HD forward-looking infrared (FLIR) camera and a unique set of underbelly police lights, a feature exclusive to the Dubai AW139. All these features enable the Air Wing to respond to either a police call or an EMS call without needing to return to base.

Why the AW139

With the Dubai Royal Flight already operating a fleet of AW139s, familiarisation and cross-platform maintenance became easy. In addition, crew training across the Royal Air Wing and the Police Air Wing, with an already established infrastructure, would reduce downtime for crews and make the transition to the AW139 easier. The large capacity and versatility of the airframe, along with the various customisations possible on the platform, are what set the helicopter apart. The optimal performance in high temperatures up to 50°C is something that suited the DPAW too, as most of the area of operation includes hot deserts or mountains.





Desert rescue

While primarily focussed on EMS and police work, a large percentage of the call volume arises from tourists stranded in the desert. It is not uncommon for the DPAW to receive calls from people unfamiliar with the desert, often finding themselves lost. Together, along with ground support from Dubai Ambulances' 'Desert Responder', the DPAW aims to rescue those stranded in the extremely hot desert as quickly as possible.

SAR also extends into the mountain ranges, such as the Hatta mountains. With high temperatures, challenging topography and no place to land, the mountains present yet another challenge for the DPAW. Most rescues that take place in the mountains require cautious manoeuvring and careful hoist operations, before casualties are handed over to the Dubai Ambulance Service.

▼ One helicopter is ready to go at any given time, with the option to mobilise all three helicopters if required

▼ DU-202 carries out hover practice over the Dubai marina, allowing the crew to fine-tune their skills for sea rescue and hoist operations

▼ DU203 was delivered later in 2019 and features a hoist that is used for sea and mountain rescue operations

Police operations

A high EMS and SAR call volume does not diminish the importance of the wing's police work. While Dubai boasts one of the lowest crime rates in the world, DPAW's success is attributed to the constant training and high patrols. In addition to its daily patrols, DPAW ensures constant training with other units of the Dubai police to respond to any calls that may arise. For instance, training with K9 units involves acclimating the dogs to a helicopter cabin and practicing mounting and dismounting techniques. Training with the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team requires practising roping techniques, tactical operations and sniping support. Police calls include requests to assist in high-speed chases, where the helicopter can keep an eye on the suspect vehicle and alert ground units. AN



Delta's



▼ Nimble and small, yet capable of accommodating over a hundred passengers, the Boeing 717 has a unique role at Delta merging mainline and regional routes effortlessly. All images Matt Falcus unless stated.

The Boeing 717 is the final chapter in a long line of commercial jets from Douglas, later McDonnell Douglas. After success with propeller airliners like the DC-3, DC-6 and DC-7, Douglas entered the jet age with the DC-8 in 1955 for the long-haul market.

By the late 1950s and 60s, smaller jets designed to replace piston airliners appeared, including the Caravelle, Trident and Boeing 727. Douglas answered with the DC-9, which first flew on December 8, 1965. Popular from the start, it entered service with Delta Air Lines and sold over 700 examples in its first decade.

Following the 1967 merger of McDonnell Aircraft and Douglas, a new generation emerged in 1980 as the MD-80 (originally the DC-9 Super 80), featuring a stretched fuselage. The MD-90 followed in 1989 with a glass cockpit and quieter IAE engines.

Next came the MD-95, a shorter derivative sized like the original DC-9-30 but incorporating modern technology and economics. Launched in 1994, ValuJet ordered 50 with options for 50 more.

After Boeing's 1997 merger with McDonnell Douglas, the MD-95 was redesignated 717-200, reviving an earlier unused sequencing number. The type first flew in 1998, entered service in 1999,

717

With only two airlines still flying the Boeing 717, is this the final hurrah for the long line of McDonnell Douglas airliners? **Matt Falcus** looks at Delta's operations with the short-haul jet



and was ordered by TWA, Hawaiian, Midwest and Olympic. Yet competition from Boeing's own 737NG, plus Airbus and regional jets, limited sales. Production ended in 2006 after just 156 aircraft.

Delta's Adoption

Delta Air Lines had a long association with Douglas products. It had flown the DC-9 since 1965 and the MD-80 and -90 series since 1987 and 1995 respectively. It was therefore seen as a likely candidate for the MD-95 and later Boeing 717. However, Delta instead relied on a large fleet of Boeing 727s and 737s to fulfil a similar role and

retired the last of its initial DC-9s in 1993 (it would later reintroduce the type following its merger with Northwest Airlines in 2010).

In 2012 an opportunity arose for Delta to acquire a fleet of Boeing 717s following the merger of AirTran and Southwest Airlines. AirTran had 88 of the aircraft but they did not fit in with Southwest's all-Boeing 737 fleet and were put up for sale or lease. For Delta, it represented a chance to replace the ageing Northwest DC-9s with what was essentially the same aircraft but with lower operating costs. It was also a chance to upgrade its regional fleets by offering larger aircraft with more seats and premium cabins.



▲ While the rearmost rows of the Boeing 717s cabin are the loudest, the views of the engine are far more interesting and something rarely seen on modern aircraft

▼ A Delta publicity shot showing the heritage of the Douglas jets prior to older examples being retired. From the rear working forwards, it includes two McDonnell Douglas MD-90s, a Douglas DC-9-50, and Boeing 717-200 Delta

Delta opted to lease the 717s from Southwest Airlines. The first aircraft, N935AT, was delivered to Delta on October 10, 2013, following painting and cabin reconfiguration in Miami. It entered service on October 25, with its first passenger service between Atlanta and Newark. Additional routes to Cleveland and Little Rock were introduced shortly after.

The initial batch of 88 Boeing 717s were delivered to Delta by February 2016, with several of the aircraft having been stored temporarily once Southwest had fully integrated AirTran's network into its own schedules and fleet. However, by this time Delta had already begun looking elsewhere for opportunities to grow its 717 fleet.

In November 2015 and January 2016, three 717s were acquired that had recently been operated by Finnish carrier Blue1. Then, during early 2023 another 13 examples were sourced via Boeing Capital Corporation, having been sold by Volotea Airlines in Spain.

The 717 at Delta today

At the time of writing, Delta's active fleet includes 75 Boeing 717s, with a further five in storage or undergoing maintenance. Following their initial lease from Southwest Airlines and Boeing, Delta has now purchased the aircraft outright.

Seen as an important part of Delta's domestic route network, these aircraft are used on mainline services out of the airline's key hubs at Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson International (ATL), Minneapolis St Paul (MSP) and Detroit Metropolitan (DTW).

The network of routes operated by Delta's 717s is mostly under two hours in length, and serves secondary cities for the most part, with larger hub airports like Newark, Chicago O'Hare and Washington Dulles also served by the type. While many of the smaller routes and cities might normally be served by Delta Connection's Bombardier and Embraer regional jets, the Boeing 717 is favourable as it offers a premium cabin and more seats where greater demand exists.

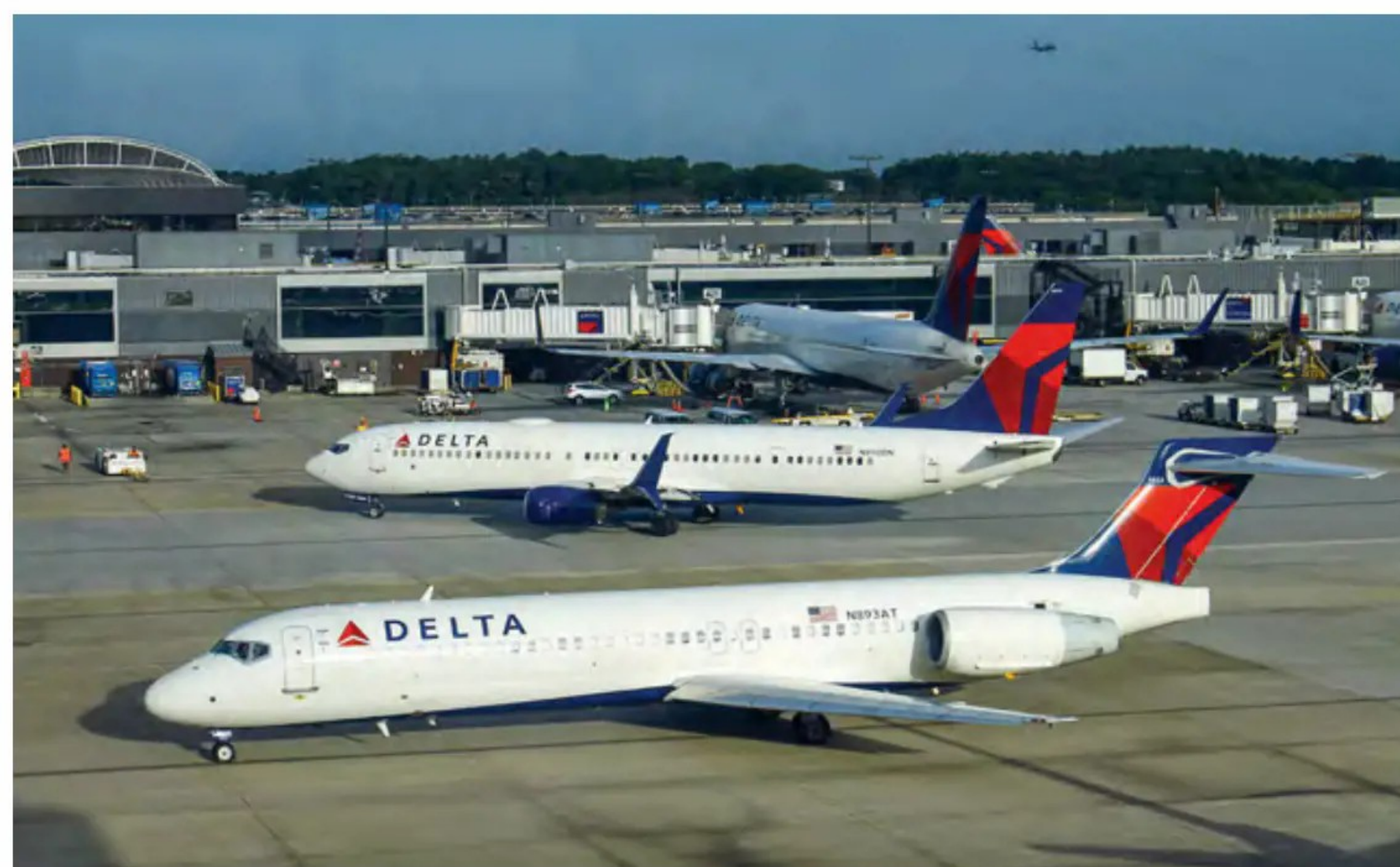
According to data provider Cirium, Delta's Boeing 717 fleet is utilised on 54 routes from Atlanta, 22 from Detroit and 16 from Minneapolis St Paul. The shortest route is between Detroit and Cleveland at just 82nm. The busiest routes are from Atlanta to Charlotte (average of eight daily flights), and Atlanta to Huntsville (average of seven daily flights). As per the summer 2025 timetable, around 13,000 flights are usually flown per month by the type, with 1.4 million seat capacity.





▲ A Delta 717 approaches Las Vegas in 2016
Erik Ritterbach

▼ As well as used Boeing 717s, Delta Air Lines has acquired many used Boeing 737-900ER aircraft. Both are seen here in Atlanta



Delta's 717s are configured with 12 Delta First in a 2-2 configuration, and 98 Economy class seats, arranged as 25 Delta Comfort and 73 Delta Main, in a 2-3 configuration. Seats offer power outlets but lack seatback entertainment screens seen in more modern aircraft.

The Boeing 717 operates with two cockpit crew and three cabin crew. One of the most notable features is the quietness of the cabin thanks to the two rear-mounted engines. Passengers seated particularly in the forward areas of the cabin report little noise compared to other aircraft types. However, the same cannot be said for the rearmost rows which are closer to the Rolls-Royce BR715 turbofans. The view from the windows of the last row of the cabin are also partly blocked by the engines.

The Future

In addition to the active fleet, a further 24 Boeing 717s have at some time been owned or operated by Delta, all of which are now either used as a source of spare parts, or have been scrapped. With a production run of fewer than 160 examples, and with limited ongoing support for the type from Boeing some 20 years after the last aircraft was built, parts supply is set to be an increasing issue for Delta. For this reason, the future of the Boeing 717 at the airline has been under intense scrutiny from aviation

insiders, travellers and the airline itself.

Delta has yet to confirm a timeline for the 717's retirement and considers it an important cog in their network for feeding passengers into its hubs. However, a process of updating and modernising the airline's mainline fleet is underway which will ultimately see the 717 replaced by more modern types. In 2020 Delta was reported to have committed to a 2025 deadline to retire the Boeing 717 alongside its 767-300s and Bombardier CRJ-200s, yet sources within the airline claim that this has now been extended by at least five years due to delivery delays on newer types which necessitates the extension of its 717 operations. It is understood that the current plan is to retire the fleet by the early 2030s, with aircraft slowly being removed over the next five years as newer aircraft are delivered.

The replacement for the Boeing 717 at Delta is the Airbus A220. The airline already has 45 of the smaller A220-100 model in service, which offers a



Following the COVID-19 pandemic Delta had made plans to retire the 717 in 2025. However, with deliveries of newer types delayed it seems the aircraft will continue into the 2030s

Delta Boeing 717

Active aircraft (Jul 2025):	75
Total 717s Owned:	104
Routes flown (Jul 2025):	92
Shortest route (DTW-CLE):	82nm
Longest route (MSP-ILM):	1,092nm
Oldest aircraft:	N949AT (26.5 years)
Youngest aircraft:	N939AT (19.5 years)

Top 10 Busiest Delta 717 Routes (July 2025):

1.	Atlanta – Charlotte – 250 monthly
2.	Atlanta – Huntsville – 222 monthly
3.	Atlanta – Asheville – 219 monthly
4.	Atlanta – Columbia Metropolitan – 209 monthly
5.	Atlanta – Lexington Blue Grass – 190 monthly
6.	Atlanta – Jackson-Medgar Wiley Evers – 181 monthly
7.	Atlanta – Dallas Love Field – 170 monthly
8.	Atlanta – Chattanooga – 159 monthly
9.	Atlanta – Tulsa – 146 monthly
10.	Detroit Metropolitan – Newark Liberty – 143 monthly



very similar capacity to the 717, along with 33 of the larger -300 model. However, delivery delays of the new types mean the remaining 67 aircraft on order will arrive much slower than originally anticipated. To stay competitive, Delta has been progressing



▲ A Delta 717 approaches the ramp at Baton Rouge. The airline uses the type extensively to secondary cities across the Eastern and Southern United States in particular

◀ The Boeing 717 was intended as a replacement for early Douglas DC-9 models when first promoted in the early 1990s as the MD-95. It features a very similar profile and cabin shape, down to the clamshell engine thrust reversers

▼ The Airbus A220 is Delta's successor to the Boeing 717. Almost 80 are already in service, with 67 more on order Delta

with a programme of refreshing the aircraft's cabins with newer slimline seats, Delta Sync WiFi and wireless entertainment options to ensure its customer product is not left behind by competitors utilising newer models. Retaining the 717 also has an implication on operating costs. With its newer Pratt & Whitney PW1000G engines, the A220 has a lower operating cost per hour, and marginally lower maintenance costs per hour. For the most part the Boeing 717 has remained a reliable workhorse for Delta. Even with the average fleet age now over 23 years, the aircraft has had few incidents. The most notable in recent times involved a nosewheel collapse on aircraft N955AT while landing at Charlotte Douglas International Airport in June 2023. A cracked lock link was to blame, with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) ordering inspections on similar mechanisms of other active 717s. Today the Boeing 717 is considered a rare airliner to see or fly but is a firm favourite among customers, pilots and enthusiasts, and is a reminder of the 60-year legacy of the Douglas DC-9 and its later generations, which have now largely disappeared from the skies. Delta remains the largest operator of the 717, alongside Hawaiian Airlines as the only other operator. Thankfully it is likely to continue flying for the foreseeable future.

AN



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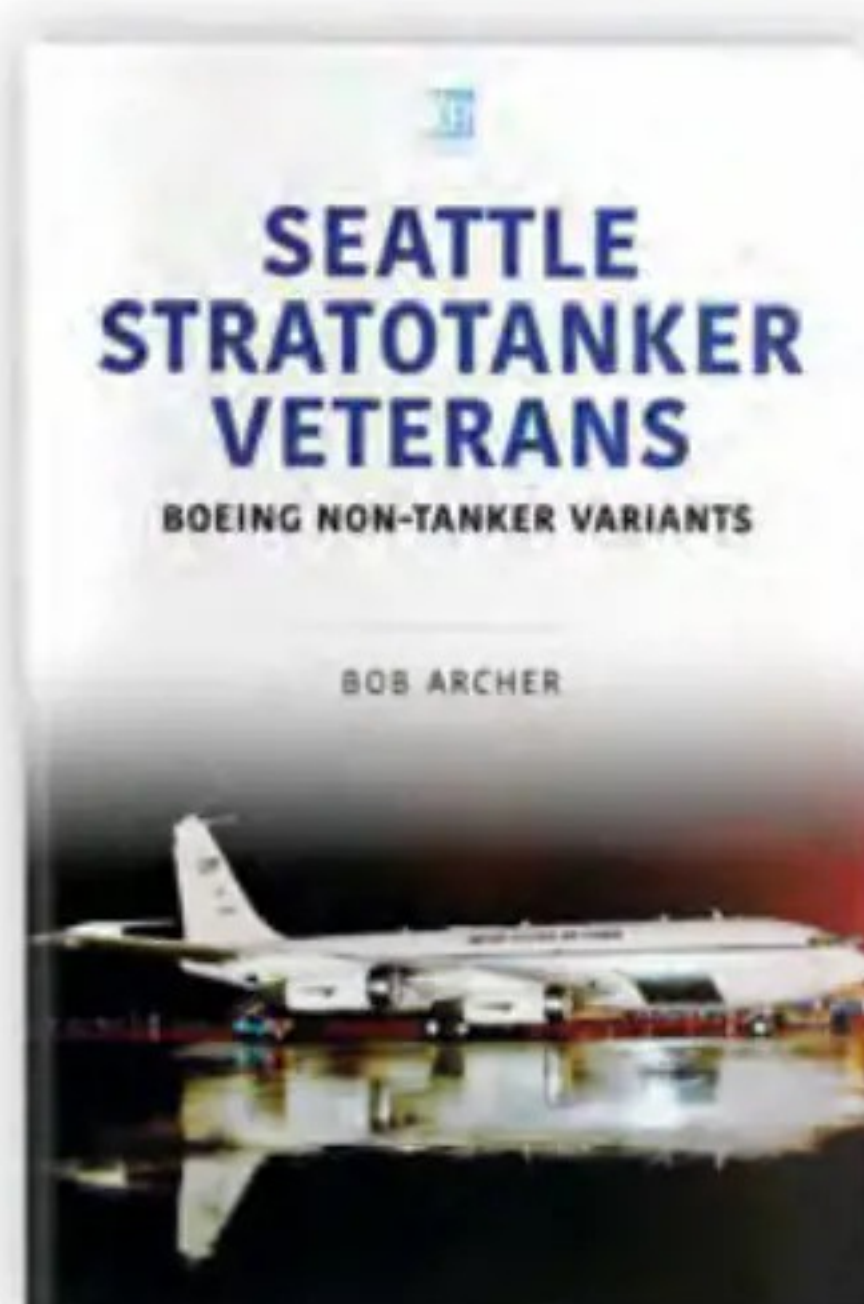
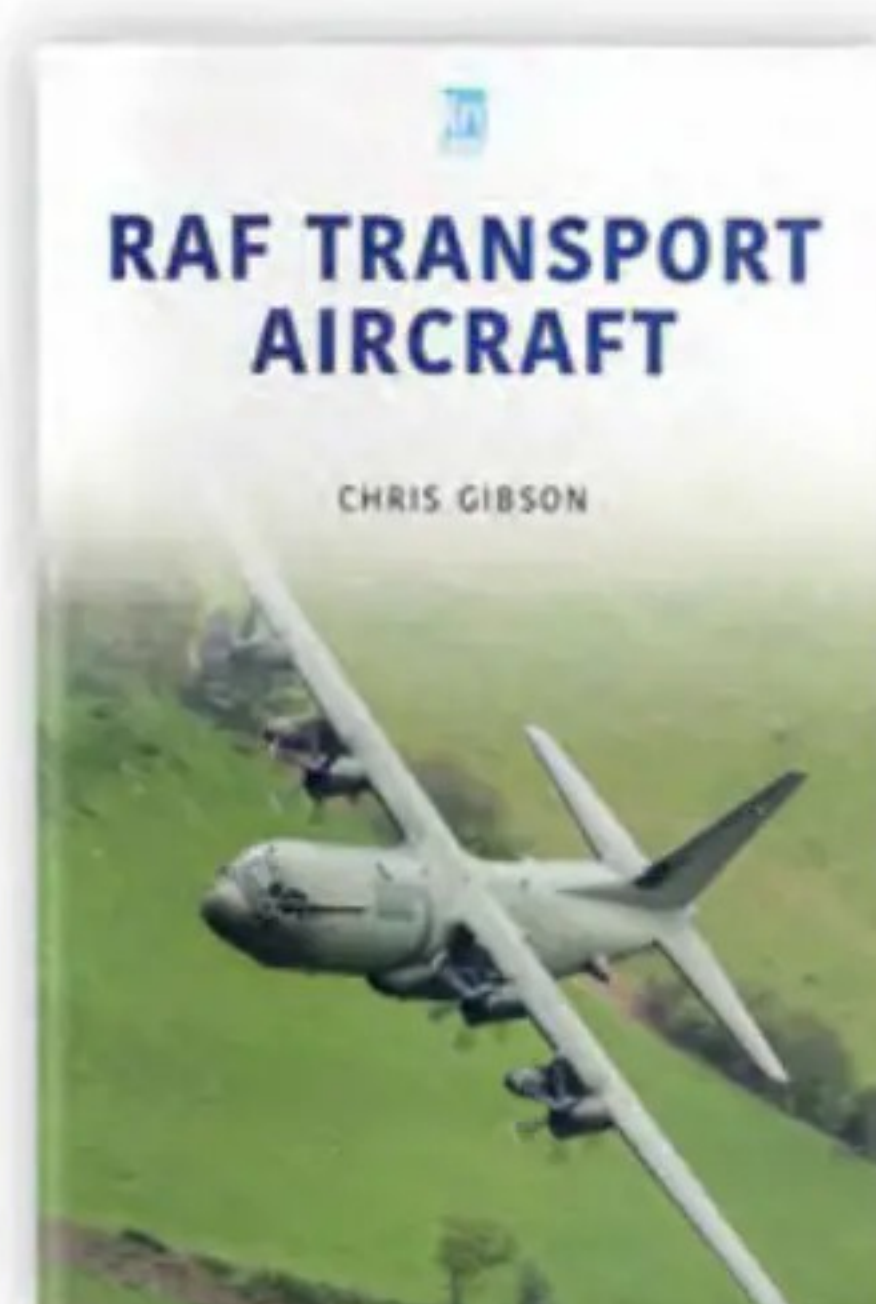
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Belgium's new backbone

Laurent Heyligen embeds with the unit responsible for training Belgium's F-35A Lightning II Fighting Force in Arizona, US



In Late October 2018, the Belgian government decided to acquire 34 Lockheed-Martin F-35A Lightning IIs as replacements for the F16AM Fighting Falcons in service with 2nd Tactical Wing at Florennes and 10th Tactical Wing at Kleine Brogel. The cost of the project was about €4bn.

The total of 34 aircraft was considerably lower than the 48 aircraft NATO had requested Belgium buy. Saab and Boeing had pulled out of the competition at a relatively early stage as they could not fulfill all requirements that were issued to the candidates, leaving the Typhoon as the only other viable option. Dassault placed a bid but was excluded as their final proposal could also not meet the requirements given by Belgium.

Production

The Belgian F-35As will be built at the Lockheed-Martin plant at Fort Worth, Texas. In November 2022, the first component of a Belgian F-35A, produced at

FACO Cameri in Italy, was noted on the assembly line. On December 10, 2023, during a ceremony at Fort Worth, the first aircraft, FL001, was unveiled in the presence of Belgian government and air force officials.

It would take another year before FL001 was effectively handed over to the Belgian Air Force (BAF). Initially, four aircraft were to be delivered between 2023 and 2030, but delays resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a rescheduling. Two aircraft were planned in late 2023 and two in the first quarter of 2024, but these plans also had to be revised. The development of the F-35 TR-3 suffered delays and Lockheed-Martin was forced to stop all F-35 deliveries.

On May 14, 2024, the first Belgian F-35, FL003, flew from Fort Worth. In the following weeks, seven other aircraft in the initial batch made their first flights.

On November 28, 2024 the Belgian Military Airworthiness Authority issued the type certification for the F-35A, clearing it for operations.

▲ The very first Belgian F-35A, FL001, taxis to the runway at Luke AFB. The nosewheel door carries the last four digits of the USAF-serial, 22-5762

All images Laurent Heyligen



Belgian Air Force F-35A Lightning IIs



▲ A focused Lt Col Pierre-Yves 'SO6' Libert in the cockpit of FL001 for a training flight

312th Fighter Squadron

On June 1, 2023, the 312th Fighter Squadron 'Scorpions' was reactivated within the 56th Fighter Wing at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Its commander is Lt Col Jason 'Chill' Wall, with the Belgian Lt Col Pierre-Yves Libert, ex-350 Squadron, callsign 'SO6', as his deputy.

The 312th is a mixed US/Belgian unit with 17 Belgian air force staff. Twelve instructor pilots – six US and six Belgian – are planned, but to clear the backlog in April 2025 an additional three US instructors were assigned, as no qualified Belgian instructors were

▼ On May 14, 2024, FL003 was the first Belgian F-35A to fly from Fort Worth

available. Forty-eight technicians and 20 support personnel are also assigned to the squadron.

On December 3, 2024, the first Belgian F-35A, serial FL002, was transferred from Fort Worth to Luke AFB and the Belgians could finally start flying. About one week later, on December 12, 2024, Lt Col Libert made the first Belgian controlled flight of the F-35A.

The other aircraft were transferred over a period of two months and, by mid-February 2025, the 312th had its full inventory of eight F-35As, FL001 to FL008.

In April, two Belgian pilots, Lt Col Pierre-Yves 'SO6' Libert and Maj Nicolas 'Fridge' Verbracken (ex-349 Squadron), finished conversion to the F-35A, but were taking the additional instructor course, a training they concluded in late June. Eight other pilots from F-16-squadrons (1 and 350 Squadron at Florennes and 31 and 349 Squadron at Kleine Brogel) were undergoing conversion. Six of these were future instructor pilots.

Conversion training

Training for the F-35 starts with a six-week theoretical stage, followed by a number of sessions in the simulator, culminating in a solo flight. An additional series of 35 flights is made, focusing on basic manoeuvres, air-to-air fighter training, air-to-ground training and air defence training. Forty-eight Belgian F-16-pilots will undergo this syllabus.

For the 28 pilots with less than 500 flying hours on the F-16, a transition course is organized, taking





about five to six months. From March 2026, a so-called B-course will start for pilots who come straight from pilot training. The type of flights are identical as those for the experienced pilots, but the theory and the number of flights on both the simulator and the actual aircraft is expanded and spread over a period of seven-and-a-half months. Pilots who are selected as instructors get additional training of 21 simulator and real flights.

Current plans will see the Belgian Air Force deployed to Luke AFB with eight aircraft until 2028, but likely this will be extended until 2031.

Maintenance training

Technicians start with a theoretical course in the Academic Training Center at Eglin AFB in Florida for a period of three to five months. This training uses several interactive courses and simulators, including a life-size model, covering all aspects of

BAF-Serial	Construction-number	FMS-Serial	First Flight	Delivery 312th FS
FL001	AY-1	22-5762	5 June 2024	9 December 2024
FL002	AY-2	22-5763	24 June 2024	3 December 2024
FL003	AY-3	22-5764	14 May 2024	February 2025
FL004	AY-4	22-5765	23 May 2024	January 2025
FL005	AY-5	22-5845	18 December 2024	13 February 2025
FL006	AY-6	22-5846	19 December 2024	24 January 2025
FL007	AY-7	22-5847	9 December 2024	8 January 2025
FL008	AY-8	22-5848	8 January 2025	13 February 2025

At 312th FS we were welcomed by Belgium's most famous news reporter, Tintin, and his friend Captain Haddock

maintenance, weapons loading and handling. After Eglin, the students move to Luke, where they receive on-the-job training, supported by Lockheed-Martin personnel, during day-to-day flight operations within the squadron. Training is currently planned for approximately 120 personnel.

The modular system of the F-35, in which a faulty part can simply be replaced by a working example, will represent a positive change in maintenance for the Belgians. Maj Loïc Van Himst, responsible for maintenance training, said: "It is a completely different story with the F-35 than with the F-16. After every F-35 flight we have access to thousands of parameters. Based on these, the onboard computer makes recommendations for repairs. What took days in the past, can be now be resolved in hours."

In late July 2025, the first technicians finished their training and returned to Belgium in time for the next phase, the F-35As' introduction at Florennes AB.

The flight lines at Luke AFB are equipped with these 'hangarettes' to protect the aircraft and personnel from the heat



Belgian Air Force F-35A Lightning IIs

New infrastructure

The 2nd Tactical Wing at Florennes AB, specifically the 1 Squadron 'Stingers', is to be the first Belgian unit to fly the aircraft. The first four jets are expected by mid-October 2025. F-35A FL009 rolled off the assembly line early June 2025 and first flew on August 14, followed by FL011 on August 15 and FL012 on August 16. Together with the yet unseen FL010, these will move with six pilots into the brand-new infrastructure that was built at Florennes.

On both F-35A-bases, Florennes and Kleine Brogel (where 10th Tactical Wing will get the F-35A by 2028), two F-35 compounds have been built by a group of Belgian and American companies called Full Throttle. The Belgian building company Jan De Nul is responsible for the design, construction and maintenance. Arcadis, in collaboration with their US partner Burns & McDonnell, acted as designer and technical consultant for the compounds, which had



Future F-35 technicians undergo training at Eglin and Luke AFB, supported by Lockheed-Martin personnel. For security reasons they are wearing face coverings



▲ Lt Col Pierre-Yves 'SO6' Libert (left) was the first Belgian pilot to fly the F-35A, seen here together with Maj Nicolas 'Fridge' Verbraken. Both are now qualified instructor pilots

▼ Line-up of the FL001 (left) and FL004 (right) right before take-off from the left runway at Luke AFB

to comply with all current safety and environmental regulations.

Each compound consists of an administrative area with offices, meeting and classrooms, auditorium, dressing rooms and cafeteria, along with a logistical area for aircraft maintenance, workshops and a spares storage area, as well as a high-security area for operations planning and training sessions. This last area also houses the four flight simulators for pilot training. The complex will also get a new flightline. Complete budget for the compounds is estimated at €275m.

Flight simulators

The Belgian Air Force will receive eight simulators, four at Florennes and four at Kleine Brogel. These can be connected so that pilots can conduct 'virtual' combined trainings missions. In the long term, they will also link with simulators used by NATO-partners, to develop a live virtual constructive training (LVCT)-capacity – a network of systems for virtual training in real-time to simulate complex threats in a virtual and collaborative environment.



In March 2025, the first components for these simulators arrived at Florennes and these were put in service by late July. The ultimate goal of the BAF is to acquire 8 effects-based simulators per base.

For the management of the simulators, a new unit – 10 Squadron ‘Silver Dragons’ – was reactivated at Florennes. This unit also deals with the standardisation of F-35A procedures and integration of the new jets in Belgian airspace and supports the other F-35A squadrons and the Florennes Flying Group.

The squadron has adopted the traditions of No 10 Squadron, which flew the Mosquito NF.30 and Meteor NF.11 night-fighters based at Beauvechain AB between 1948-1957. A similar unit will be created at Kleine Brogel.

The future

In late July 2025, the decision was made to order a second batch of 11 F-35A. These will be built at FACO (F-35 Final Assembly and Check Out) in Italy. The choice for FACO was influenced by the call to ‘Buy European’ after the various issues on tariffs were announced by the current US administration. At the same meeting it was decided to update

the 2022 Safety, Technology, Ambition and Resilience plan that covers the modernisation and strengthening of the Belgian armed forces. Part of this update is the study for a third batch of 10 F-35As, bringing the total to 55, which is closer to current NATO-plans.

- We would like to thank the Belgian Defense Press Office and members of the 312th Fighter Squadron for their kind reception and support 

▲ Take-off of the FL001, soon to be a familiar sight at Florennes and Kleine Brogel

▼ FL007 taxi' to Luke's main runway.



The latest changes on the UK, Irish, Isle of Man and Guernsey registers

New Registrations

Reg	Type	S/N	1st Named Registered Owner
G-CMFL	ATR 72-212 A	1339	EMERALD AIRLINES UK LTD
G-ABTC	COMPER CLA7 SWIFT	S32/1	C. D. CHEESE
G-CMFV	ULTRA-UAS	Mk2-025	WINDRACERS LTD
G-CMZB	EUROFOX 3K	73425	R. J. BIRD
G-CMZN	CAMERON SPORT-60	12786	L. P HOOPER
G-CMZR	CAMERON Z-225	10455	B. MELZER
G-CNAE	EC130 T2	9794	AIRBUS HELICOPTERS
G-CNAL	SKYRANGER NYNJA	BMAA/HB/767	A. GILRUTH
G-CNAV	DG-1000S	10-305S204	WOLDS GLIDING CLUB LTD
G-CNBS	BB22E	2454	NOVA BALLOON SERVICES LTD
G-CNCR	DIAMOND F-70	DB-SN-040	A. M. HOLLY
G-DEDH	MOSQUITO B	184	I. L. PATTINGALE
G-DKNN	AERO L-159E	156011	FR AVIATION LTD
G-DKNO	AERO L-159E	156018	FR AVIATION LTD
G-DKNR	AERO L-159E	156021	FR AVIATION LTD
G-DKNT	AERO L-159E	156044	FR AVIATION LTD
G-DMDM	TL-3000 SIRIUS	25 SI 250	D AND C MURRELL LTD
G-EJIT	DIAMOND P-60	DB-SN-034	EVOS GROUP LTD
G-EMCY	LEARJET 45	45-421	247 AVIATION LTD
G-EMCZ	LEARJET 45	45-454	247 AVIATION LTD
G-ENEA	CESSNA 182P	182-60895	A. J. GLOMB
G-ESAR	AW139	31992	DEVELOPING ASSETS (UK) LTD
G-HITG	AS350B3	9771	AIRBUS HELICOPTERS UK LTD
G-JILI	VANS RV-7	PFA 323-14018	H. R. HAWKINS
G-MZAB	MAINAIR BLADE	1043-0695-7-W841	J. C. RING
G-MZHP	PEGASUS QUANTUM 15 (MODIFIED)	7353	W. J. FLOOD
G-NOLA	BOEING 737-8	43302	ASCEND AIRWAYS LTD
G-NWFB	CESSNA 152	152-80455	NORTH WEALD FLIGHT TRAINING LTD
G-ONEG	BOEING 777F	68454	ONE AIR LTD
G-PTZZ	RYAN PT 22 A	1676	M. P. BLOKLAND
G-RVTD	VANS RV-14	LAA 393-15886	S. J. FARRANT
G-SALW	DA 42	42.341	SKYBORNE AVIATION TRAINING LTD
G-SUNR	AIRBUS A321-251NX	12641	JET2.COM LTD
G-TEEF	DIAMOND P-90	DB-SN-033	A. M. HOLLY
G-TEKM	TEKEVER AR5 EVOLUTION MK 2.3	535	TEKEVER LTD
G-TESD	DA 40 D	D4.293	TESLA SOLUTIONS LTD
G-TLDI	TL-3000 SIRIUS 600	22 SI 222	D. J. CURTIS
G-TWWC	BOEING B75N1	75-7128	THE WING WALK COMPANY LTD

De-Registrations			
Mark	Type	Removal Reason	To
G-BDUI	CAMERON V-56	Cancelled by CAA	
G-BKHG	PIPER J3C-65	Transferred to another country or authority	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
G-BPGK	AERONCA 7AC	Transferred to another country or authority	REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
G-BTFV	MW7	Cancelled by CAA	
G-BTYT	CESSNA 152	Transferred to UK Registration Mark	G-NWFB
G-CEBM	QUIK GT450	Cancelled by CAA	
G-CHNY	CENTRAIR 101A	Cancelled by CAA	
G-CJRR	DISCUS BT	Cancelled by CAA	
G-CLNH	SIKORSKY S-92A	Permanently withdrawn from use	
G-CMFC	DHC-1 CHIPMUNK 22	Cancelled by CAA	
G-CMLA	TL-3000 SIRIUS 600	Transferred to UK Registration Mark	G-TLDI
G-CMXW	ULTRA-UAS	Permanently withdrawn from use	
G-CMZF	GAZELLE AH.MK1	Transferred to another country or authority	SOUTH AFRICA
G-CNCB	SIKORSKY S-76C	Transferred to another country or authority	CANADA
G-CSPT	GA8-TC 320	Transferred to another country or authority	ROMANIA
G-CTSA	DA 40 NG	Transferred to another country or authority	REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
G-CTSF	DA 40 NG	Transferred to another country or authority	REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
G-CTSJ	DA 40 NG	Transferred to another country or authority	REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
G-CTSK	DA 40 NG	Transferred to another country or authority	REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
G-DBZX	SCHLEICHER KA 6CR	Cancelled by CAA	
G-HITF	AS350B3	Transferred to another country or authority	AUSTRALIA
G-IYII	BOEING B75N1	Transferred to UK Registration Mark	G-TWWC
G-LOTE	PIPER PA-28-161	Permanently withdrawn from use	
G-MAOL	AW109SP	Transferred to another country or authority	ISLE OF MAN
G-MIDT	AIRBUS A320-232	Permanently withdrawn from use	
G-MVDA	GEMINI FLASH IIA	Destroyed	
G-MZEG	MAINAIR BLADE	Cancelled by CAA	
G-NOCM	CESSNA 525A	Transferred to another country or authority	GUERNSEY
G-OLFE	MYSTERE-FALCON 20-E5	Cancelled by CAA	
G-PKPK	SCHWEIZER 269C	Transferred to another country or authority	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
G-SAJS	EMB-145EP	Permanently withdrawn from use	
G-STOP	ROBINSON R44 II	Transferred to another country or authority	REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
G-TCBX	RANS S7	Permanently withdrawn from use	
G-WKTI	DA 62	Transferred to another country or authority	MALTA

CIVILIAN MOVEMENTS

Ben Stanley Hall showcases the array of interesting aircraft movements up and down the UK

We welcome contributions from readers across the world. If you photograph an aircraft that is not in its usual location or

could be of interest, please email your images, without watermarks, to ben.hall@keypublishing.com using the subject

heading 'Just Passing Through', with a short caption including as much information as possible. [AN](#)



The only aircraft in Elio Jet's fleet, Embraer Phenom OK-ELD c/n 50500585, just seconds from landing at Liverpool John Lennon Airport on September 8 John Spencer



▲ This Saab 340A(F) of Latvian company RAF-Avia was photographed at Edinburgh Airport in September. The aircraft was operating a cargo charter from Toulouse in France. It departed to Liverpool shortly afterwards as YL-RAG (c/n 340A-052. B-1 images



▲ On September 14, Korean Air 7370-700 BBJ, HL8222, landed at Manchester from Luton Airport. Martin Cartledge



▲ Both 4K-AI001 and 4K-AI08, belonging to the Azerbaijani government, were captured at London Heathrow on September 22. The aircraft were en-route to UN Week in New York, having night-stopped at LHR. Nik French



▲ Ahead of the airline placing its soon-to-arrive Airbus A321XLRs on transatlantic services, American Airlines has been sending one of its A321neos from Philadelphia to Edinburgh for crew training. This particular A321-253NX, N471AN (c/n 12262), was delivered to the airline in November 2024. It was pictured at the Scottish capital on September 5 B-1 IMAGES



▲ Texel Air Boeing 737-8Q8BCF, A9C-JNC (c/n 30672), is shown departing East Midlands Airport after being painted at Airbourne Colours. The 21-year-old freighter arrived the week before from Bahrain, wearing full DHL colours, but has now been repainted into Texel's livery. The aircraft was first delivered in passenger configuration to Malev in May 2004 and also served with S7, before freighter conversion and delivery to Texel in 2022 Matthew Cockrell

MILITARY MOVEMENTS

Ben Stanley Hall showcases the rich diversity of military aircraft up and down the UK

September was the month of visitors to the UK, with President Trump having a second state visit to the UK, Japanese Eagles flying across the Atlantic and ex Cobra Warrior taking place. We wanted to offer

some other movements that took place around the UK and were less covered.

We welcome contributions from readers across the world. If you photograph an aircraft that is not in its usual location or could be of

interest, please email your images, without watermarks, to ben.hall@keypublishing.com using the subject heading 'Just Passing Through', with a short caption including as much information as possible. **AN**



Grumman C-2 Greyhound 162166 '51' of VRC-40 'Rawhides' approaches London Stansted Airport whilst performing its 'Carrier Onboard Delivery' (COD) role in support of USS Gerald R. Ford which, at the time, was stationed just off the Norwegian coast. Chris Gilligan



▲ on September 12, this German Air Force KC-130J 55+05 arrived into Glasgow from Evreux Fauville Air Base in France. After getting some fuel, it was off to Goose Bay. Kyle Mckinlay



▲ The first two Grob 120TP/CT-102B 'Astra II' of the Royal Canadian Air Force passed through Prestwick on the 04th of September. The aircraft are pictured arriving from the Grob factory in Germany on the first stage of first stage of their delivery flight. After some fuel, the aircraft continued their journey and routed to Reykjavik in Iceland. They wore their German test registrations with the last three of their Canadian serials on the nose. D-EZZG will become 102201, and D-EZZH will become 122202. B-1 images



◀ CanForce 0154 and 0155 arriving at RAF Waddington, as part of the 2nd flight of three jets from 425 Squadron RCAF for Cobra Warrior 25-2. The jets were 0154 - 188749, 0155 - 188729, 0156 - 188767, all single seat CF-188s in 425 Squadron marks. Micheal Hiley

▼ On September 11, A "Naked" (unmarked) C-5 Galaxy lifts from RAF Mildenhall as RCH 2120. Mark Lynham



◀ two F-16CM's from the 20th Fighter Wing deployment to the 'sand pit' made the transit from Aviano to Lakenheath on 16th September as 'Tabor 45 & 46'. Serials 93-0548 & 94-0041 sporting the 79thFS Tiger fin colour and 'Gamblers' Red respectively. Peter R Foster



▲ Supporting the 'Atlantic Eagles' deployment to Europe was a pair of Japanese Air Self Defence Force Kawasaki C-2 transport aircraft. The domestically developed aircraft helped to carry personnel and equipment used for the deployment. Here is 58-1218 (c/n 018) is pictured at RAF Coningsby in golden hour. Key- Ben Stanley Hall



▲ The final batch of T-6C 'Texan II' aircraft destined for the Vietnamese Air Force were delivered through Glasgow on 10/11 September. Two of the three aircraft, N2832B/610, and N2845B/612 arrived from Keflavik in Iceland before departing to Lyon in France the following morning. The third aircraft, N2840B/611 was delayed in Keflavik. B-1 images

Next Month



Aviation News



The French Ministry of Armed Forces

Cobra Warrior Review

We discuss the recent Cobra Warrior 25-2 training exercise hosted by the RAF

Good Samaritans

We visit Samaritan's Purse and its aircraft currently operating out of Scotland to provide aid in the Middle East

First class on short-haul

We investigate the new SAS premium service on short-haul flights.

French Guardians

We dive into the Falcon 200 (20H) fleet of the French Navy in Tahiti and New Caledonia



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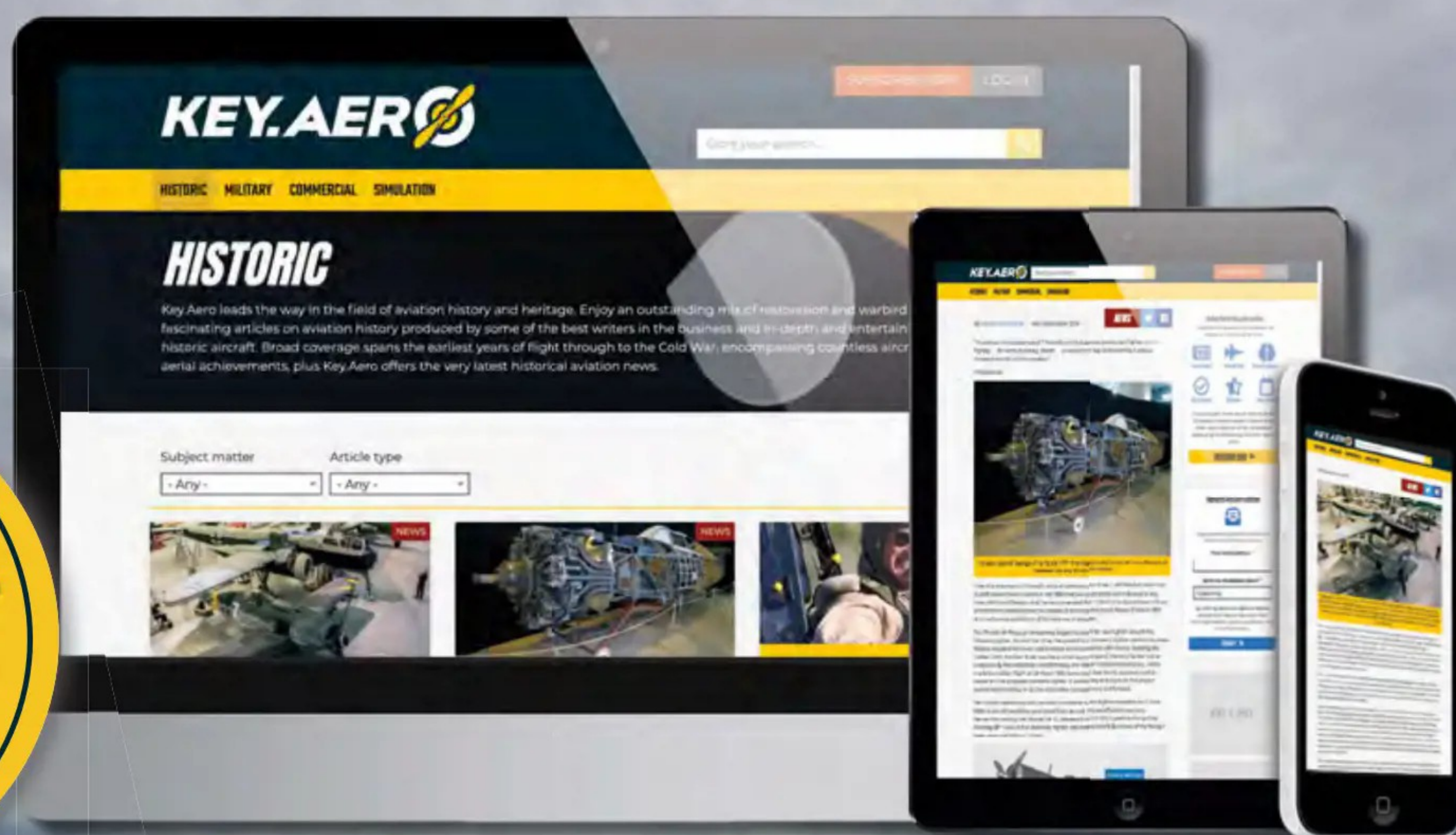
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